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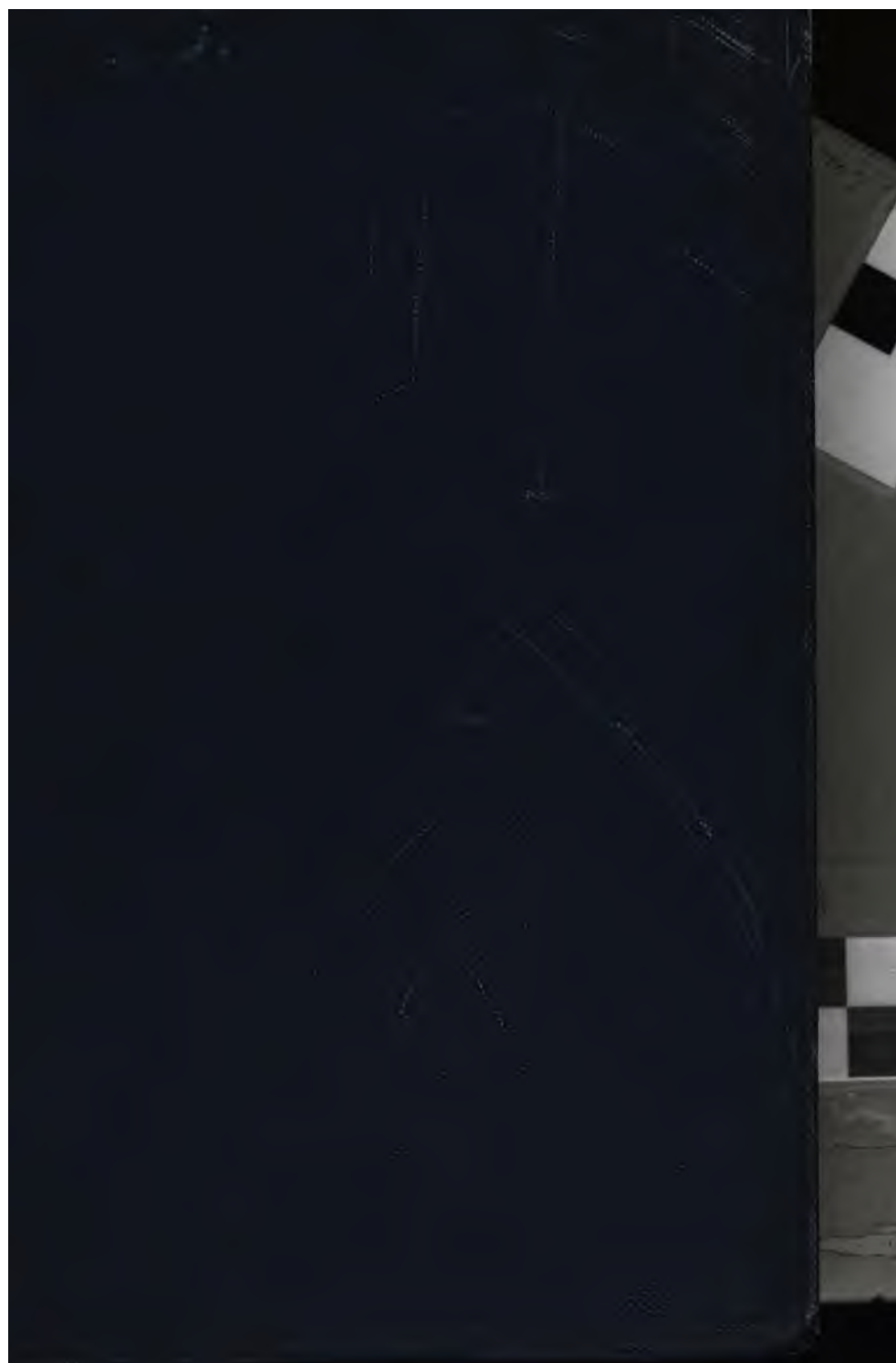
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31

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AN INTRODUCTION
TO THE
STUDY OF POETRY

AN INTRODUCTION
TO THE
STUDY OF POETRY

BY
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"LAKES AND MOUNTAINS OF EASTERN AND CENTRAL AFRICA"

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σκαίους δὲ λέγων κούδέν τι σοφούς
τοὺς πρόσθε βροτοὺς οὐκ ἂν ἀμάρτοις,
οἵτινες ὕμνους ἐπὶ μὲν θαλίαις
ἐπὶ τ' εἰλαπίναις καὶ παρὰ δειπνοῖς
εὐροντο, βίου τερπνὰς ἀκοὰς,
στυγίους δὲ βροτῶν οὐδεὶς λύπας
εὐρετο μούσῃ καὶ πολυχόρδοις
ψαῖς παύειν, ἐξ ὧν θάνατοι
δεινὰ τε τύχαι σφάλλουσι δόμους·
καίτοι τάδε μὲν κέρδος ἀκείσθαι
μολπαῖσι βροτούς· ἵνα δ' εὐδαιπνοὶ
δαῖτες, τί μάτην τείνουσι βοῶν;
τὸ παρὼν γὰρ ἔχει τέρψιν ἅφ' αὐτοῦ,
δαιτὸς πλήρωμα βροτοῖσιν.

EUR., *Med.* 190.

PREFACE.



THE contents of this volume originally formed part of a course of lectures which were given some four years ago in connection with the Cambridge "University Extension," and afterwards before an English audience at Dresden. The interest which the subject elicited on these occasions has made me venture to hope that a few readers may be found, no less sympathetic and indulgent than my former hearers. I have left almost everything as it was written, instead of attempting to recast the whole into what might be thought a form more suitable for publication, although I am aware that much which in a lecture may be allowable, and even attractive, is apt to appear crude, superficial, and incoherent in a book.

I trust that the didactic and familiar tone, which one naturally assumes as a lecturer, will not be resented, though I feel that at times I have perhaps

insisted rather too urgently and repeatedly on elementary truths in respect of which a reader prefers to be credited with at least as much discernment as the author.

My object was to state and illustrate in as simple and as interesting a manner as possible, and with special reference to poetry, what I believe to be the true nature and end of artistic creation. But I feel too deeply the impossibility of *stating* any truth directly and completely, to wish that what I affirm should be considered as offering more than partial and temporary aspects. Truth seems to lie *between* conflicting thoughts (as a particle in equilibrium amidst opposing forces), and to be itself incapable of statement, though not of artistic representation ; and this fact may often suffice to explain apparent inconsistencies, and even contradictions in the following pages.

“ For no thought is contented. The better sort,
As thoughts of things divine, are intermix'd
With scruples, and do set the word itself
Against the word.”

Richard II., Act v. sc. 5.

I can but hope that, in spite of many imperfections and doubtless some errors, the attempted

expression of what I hold to be essential beliefs on the subject of the poetic faculty may be of use to those (and to them I principally address this book) who are beginning to feel the charm of art and are desirous of estimating the value of its influence, and may also prove not wholly uninteresting even to some of those who have already formed opinions different from mine, and who are not prepared to accept any ideal theory. "Platonism" is nowadays, I am aware, a synonym for vague and inaccurate thought, and is not unfrequently used as a term of keen contempt; but one who does not find in modern "scientific philosophy" some basis as satisfactory to his mind as that supplied by the ideal theory (though, as a theory, of no more absolute and intrinsic value than any other) may be content to err with Plato at least to the extent of accepting his basis, if not his intellectual superstructure. And, after all, it is the basis that is of primary importance in philosophy, unless indeed we are to limit that word to the study of certain phenomena, and to define it, with one of the latest writers on the subject, as a "special department of scientific research."

On many occasions I have used the thoughts and

the words of others, when they coincided with or expressed my own thoughts. If I have sometimes failed to acknowledge the debt in full, I trust it will be a sufficient apology to say that after four years it has not been easy to trace everything back to its original source.

NYASSA HOUSE,
LIEBIG STRASSE, 11,
DRESDEN.

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. LITERATURE—ITS ORIGIN AND NATURE	I
II. ART CREATION	36
III. SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF ANCIENT AND MODERN ART	80
IV. THE MEDIÆVAL SPIRIT AND THE REVIVAL ...	123
V. THE CLASSICAL SCHOOL AND THE NEW REVIVAL ...	146
VI. COLERIDGE	179
VII. WORDSWORTH	208
VIII. KEATS	242
IX. BYRON	269
X. SHELLEY	298

AN INTRODUCTION

TO THE

STUDY OF POETRY.



CHAPTER I.

LITERATURE—ITS ORIGIN AND NATURE.

THE object that I have proposed to myself is the consideration of the nature and end of poetry. In dealing with this question I shall make no attempt to give any strict analysis, but shall endeavour so to express my own convictions that I may seem more anxious to suggest than to convince,—to exhibit and to excite a belief in the dignity and value of art, rather than to insist on any theory.

With this end in view I intend (i.) to consider the origin and nature of literature, (ii.) to discuss the question of art creation, with special reference to poetry, (iii.) to treat, for the purpose of illustration, the works and, as far as may seem necessary, the lives of certain English poets.

Firstly, therefore, what do we mean by *literature*?

2 INTRODUCTION TO STUDY OF POETRY.

Like many other words, this word "literature" has a broad popular meaning, as well as a special limited meaning.

In its broadest acceptance it evidently means the art of communication by means of letters, whether they be written, printed, painted, embroidered, engraved, or in any way presented; and also the material result of this art, namely, "visible speech" in every form—books of all kinds, small and great, bound or unbound; newspapers, pamphlets, Shakespeares, blue-books, red-books, Dantes, clergy-lists, dictionaries, Miltons, manuscripts, menus, Moabite stones, peer-ages, biographies, natural histories, sermons, Runic and Assyrian inscriptions, tradesmen's bills, bibles, telegrams, placards, epitaphs, and so on.

And a mighty power indeed among men is this same art! Think for an instant—where in civilization should we be without it? Is the power of steam—the power by means of which we transmit bodily substances, our own bodies included, with ease and rapidity hither and thither—to be compared with this power of communicating our thoughts to our fellow-men, to tens of thousands, to ages yet unborn?

Think, too, of the ease and rapidity and universality of the thing! Consider for a moment the close-printed columns of the daily newspapers, the reviews, magazines, weeklies, monthlies, quarterlies, with their deluge of facts, of advertisements, of critical essays, of political, theological, social, and moral dogmatisms!

Consider the endless ever-increasing flood of books of every kind that swamp our tables, and are piled up in our libraries, to read whose very titles would consume a lifetime!

What does all this signify but an intense unnaturally developed passion for the interchange of thought? Unnaturally, I say: for it has to a great extent ceased to be a true interchange of thought. With the enormous increase of facilities for learning the thoughts of others we seem to be losing our own independence of thought, content to spend the time and energy that are at our disposal for such matters in laying in, for private consumption or re-issue, a stock of what Plato well calls the unnutritious fodder of opinion. It is indeed impossible to realize fully the extent of our dependence, and the influence that this art of literature possesses nowadays in directing our thoughts and acts, in modelling our characters. Surely, therefore, it must be of no small importance that we should learn to estimate such things at their true worth, that we should be able to select for our own guidance the best, and reject the false.

Let our thought go back a few centuries—when scarce one in a thousand, in Europe at least, could use this art of letters; when in a few manuscripts, treasured as priceless heirlooms, hidden away in monastic cells, was sealed up the message of past ages; when thirty thousand students flocked to the hill of St. Geneviève to hear the voice of learning

4 INTRODUCTION TO STUDY OF POETRY.

from the lips of Peter Abelard, unable to learn it but from the living voice. Still earlier, ere writing had been there devised, think how the rhapsodists of Greece and Asia Minor wandered through their lands, reciting at the courts of kings, and the crowded festivals of the gods, the epic of Troy ; when a man's memory was his library. What a gigantic influence has arisen since those days ! "Certainly," says Carlyle, "the art of writing is the most miraculous of all things man has devised."

We find it difficult to realize this now ; but there are those still on the earth who can do so. It was not long ago that I happened to be in a part of Central Africa where no white man had been before. I was separated from my companions—a hundred miles distant. War was raging around me ; the road was difficult. I wished to communicate with those whom I had left behind. "Who will return," I asked of the naked savages, "to the white men and carry them something from me ?" Numbers volunteered, glad to earn a yard of cloth for the job. A letter was written, and offered to a man, and he was told that this piece of paper would inform my friends of all—that it would *speak* to them. He dropped the letter on the ground, and ran away. Others were tried, but it was useless. A great crowd assembled, and, at a safe distance, gazed at the little bit of paper fluttering on the ground. "It is medicine," they said. "It is charmed." In vain I tried to

reason them out of their terror. None would touch it. "Will no one," I said, "keep it and give it to the white men as they pass this way?" A yell of refusal and excited gesticulations answered my request. "Then I shall place it here, in this tree," I said, moving towards it, while the crowd dispersed in flight, "and you can point it out to the white men when they come." Even this they refused to do. My friends passed close under the tree, but no one dared show them the charmed thing; and there it is probably to this day, fluttering on the branch of that stunted fig-tree, like an evil spirit, the awe and terror of the tribe.

I shall now sketch briefly—with only such detail and continuity as may be necessary for my object—the origin and development of this miraculous art of civilized man, so that we may see the nature of the thing, and be better enabled to discern its true characteristics and its true functions when limited to the meaning to which I propose confining it.

And to do this we must go back to what is rather a philological subject—the origin of words unwritten; the origin, that is, of language.

Whether or not the faculty of speech was innate in man—as distinguished from the other animals,—or whether it was taught him by Divine agency; whether it was developed from a few elementary roots that exist as a part of the human constitution, or from the imitative power by means of which man named the animals from their cries, and gave ex-

6 INTRODUCTION TO STUDY OF POETRY.

pression to his feelings by ejaculations—these are questions, however interesting, that we must not enter upon here. However he is enabled to do so, man is enabled to speak and to write. What do we mean by speaking and by writing? Let us try to solve this question, so that we may pave the way for the consideration of our subject. First let us see what makes us *require* language; then, how *writing* became a representation of language.

The philosopher will tell us that our mind not only receives through the senses impressions of the outer world—is not only receptive—not only *apprehends* the form, colour, and other qualities of an object, but has an active power by which it combines these external impressions into a conception of the object.* As a proof of the existence of these two acts of what may be called loosely sensation and consciousness, or perception and conception, it is frequently the case that the one exists without the other. Extreme emotion may make us insensible to the pain of a wound, to a sight, or a sound; and, in so far as the thing is merely presented to us by our eyes or ears or sense of touch, and not *comprehended* by our intellect, so far we have no right to speak of it as pain, as a sight, or a sound. This twofold faculty of the mind must be noted, for I shall refer to it later when I have to speak of the creative power of the poet. And even in our

* Arist. de Animâ, iii. 5. *Νοῦς ποιητικός, νοῦς παθητικός.*

ordinary conceptions there is something creative. "The world of appearances," says Dr. Farrar, "is *re-created* by the intelligence into an ideal world of general conceptions." Wordsworth in several passages uses a similar expression. He speaks—

"Of all the mighty world
Of eye and ear, both what they half *create*
And what perceive.'

And again—

"My voice proclaims
How exquisitely the individual mind
. to the external world
Is fitted ; and how exquisitely too
The external world is fitted to the mind ;
And the *creation* (for by no lower name
Can it be called) which they with blended might
Accomplish."

I have said that the active conceptive power of the mind may be absent or dormant, and thus produce an unconsciousness of what the senses present to us. Notice, in passing, that this conceptive power may act also independently of the senses,—that it can form combinations of things unseen : can create, and people a world of its own. At present, however, let us confine ourselves to our conception of facts, and the means of communicating them.

Our eyes present to us a material object, of a certain form, colour, and substance. It is a solid globe of a certain size and contour, of a certain shade of yellow. Our touch tells us that it is soft and

pulpy. Our sense of smell reminds us of another similar object that we have seen before. We put this object into a class, and in doing this we have used a power which the Greeks called λόγος, the power of classification, and which we call understanding, or the conceptive power. "The act of the understanding," says Coleridge, "that brings any given object or impression into the same class with any other objects or impressions by means of some character or characters common to them all is *conception*."

Were one alone in the world, this classification of objects (which is certainly a power possessed by the animals in common with us) would be sufficient. But we wish to transmit these conceptions to others: and the way in which we do this is by making a certain audible, visible, or tangible symbol that, by mutual agreement, shall stand for this or that class. It may be a gesture, a representation in wood, stone, or any material, a drawing of the object, or a hundred other things. But the way that has been found to be easiest and best is that of producing a sound. We call the round, yellow, pulpy, fragrant thing, an orange. We make a picture of that sound—and it is the written word *orange*.

But, leaving language, let us turn our attention for a few minutes from this method of communicating our conceptions, and consider some others for the sake of comparison.

To some—and among these we naturally find

Rousseau—the most direct and simple method of communication has seemed to be that of gesture. These philosophers talk of the “plague and confusion of tongues,” and dream fondly of an universal language of signs, such as they affirm that the brutes possess. The wonderful development of this gesture language in the case of the deaf and dumb proves its capabilities. It is said (I know not with what truth) that the deaf and dumb of different nations can understand each other by means of this language. Among ourselves, too, how much more expressive than any words may be the quiver of a lip, a glance, the pressure of a hand! The less civilized nations—Orientals and Africans—will convey their thoughts to one another by mute gestures to an extent almost incredible. Even among the more demonstrative civilized nations, such as the Italians and French, how much is signified by a shrug, or an expressive sweep of the hand.

A Portuguese gentleman in Mozambique, passing another rapidly in his drive, will make a quick succession of signs to his friend. At a certain hour on a certain day that friend will answer the summons to dinner or lunch or breakfast.





I need scarcely mention the extraordinary power of communicating thought and feelings that an actor possesses in facial expression and gesture.

It is said that the well-known conspiracy of the Sicilian Vespers was wholly organized by mute signs, without the utterance of a single word.


Cicero, when asked what were the chief requisites of an orator, "There are three," he said. "The first is gesture, the second is gesture, and the third is—gesture."

Such is one method that the imitative power of man has devised. Another is to represent an object or impression not by means of our own bodies, but with other material—depicting therewith the object itself. When Cortez landed in Mexico, a letter was sent to the chief Montezuma with the tidings that white men with enormous canoes had appeared on the coast. I call it a letter. It was a *picture* of the scene.*




The bushmen of South Africa are generally spoken of as the most degraded specimens of humanity. Yet they possess a literature. It is a literature not of words but of depicted scenes. In many a river-side cave you may read of fierce conflicts with the white conquerors of that land. Here are the blazing villages, the huddling droves of captured cattle, the slain, the fugitives, the victors. Here is a chapter of their national history.

One step further. Look at this ☉: that is unmistakably the sun. And this ♀: still more evidently the moon. This  is a mountain. This  a dog, and  a man:  a tree. They are just such pictures as a child would draw.

* The Mexicans, however, possessed an alphabet of some kind, as may be seen from an ancient Codex in the Japanese Palace at Dresden.

And that is just what they are—letters from the picture-alphabet of a nation's infancy, the alphabet of the ancient Chinese. Some of you may recognize in this  an ox's head. It is also the old form of Aleph, the first letter in the Hebrew alphabet. So, too, the Greek Delta (Δ) is said to be a tent or tent door. Here is the picture of a saw (ξ), the Greek letter Xi. Here a whistling, hurtling arrow (ψ)—Psi.

Is it not evident that these letters—that all letters—were originally nothing more than direct representations, pictures, of the object that he who first figured them wished to present?

But objects are innumerable. There are many also which refuse to be thus represented. How is this difficulty to be surmounted? How, for instance, shall we represent *light*? By placing the sun and the moon together ). There we have a combination to represent a new conception. Again, here is the mountain—here the man. Put the man over the mountain . That is a man on a mountain—namely a hermit. Here is an eye and water . It represents tears.* Thus also a picture of a mouth and a bird represents “singing;” an ear at an open door means “curiosity;” a mouth at an open door is the note of interrogation.

But it was found necessary to come to some agreement by which the picture should not merely

* These figures are borrowed from Dr. Farrar's “Language and Languages.”

represent the one object but something else. This we are able to effect by our powers of memory, even in cases where there exists *no affinity whatever* between the symbol and what it represents. Notice, in passing, that such associative power, dependent on the memory, is possessed by the brutes as well as by ourselves, and that (as I hope to show more clearly later) our power differs from theirs solely in the fact that we are capable of using such symbols to represent *that* of which they have no apprehension. In a word, it is the distinctive characteristic of man that he can accept and use a finite symbol as the representative of an infinite idea.

As an example of symbolism, take the Egyptian hieroglyphics. In these, we are told, the object was indicated either by the direct figurative, pictorial, method, or indirectly by a symbol. Thus the picture of a man signified a man : but a serpent denoted not only a serpent, but also regal authority ; a lion could be used as the symbol of Phtha or Vulcan, the element of fire.

Now, *written language*, or phonetic representation, is a very different thing from this pictorial method. But the process by which it was developed is similar. In this case we do not use a picture of the original object, but accept a certain symbol to represent a sound, which sound again is itself the representative of the original object.

How is this to be done? What kind of symbol

or picture can signify a sound? One method seems obvious.

If there is a name of an object which contains a marked characteristic sound, let us draw a picture of that object to represent that sound. Clemens of Alexandria tells us that the hieroglyphics are of two kinds: one kind is symbolic—this we have already discussed; the other “expresses its meaning by the first elements.” Now the Greek word for “elements” means also “letters,” and we know that some of the figures in these old Egyptian inscriptions do *not* stand as direct or symbolic pictures, but that they are meant to represent the initial sound of the name of the object that they depict,—that, in fact, they are *letters* in our sense of the word—the first letters of the name of the thing depicted. To make this clearer, I will quote what a learned writer on the subject (M. Champollion) says. “The sound ‘r’ is represented in the names of the Roman emperors written in hieroglyphics, sometimes by a *mouth* (Coptic. Rô), sometimes by a *tear* (Rmeiê).” The names of these objects began with the sound which we now call “r,”* and consequently a picture of any one of these three things was adopted to

* In Egyptian the first phonetics were syllabic. Thus Osiris was denoted by a throne (os) and an eye (iri). Later the syllables were divided into their constituent sounds, corresponding with each separate movement of the organs of speech. But picturing and picture-writing continued to be used by them together with phonetics till a late date. The Phœnicians were probably the first who used an alphabet of true

represent that sound. Similarly "1" was represented by a lion, or a lotus-flower ; by the former in the case of a king's, and by the latter in that of a queen's name. Such a picture would now lose its use as a picture, and in course of time possibly might suffer changes which would make it unrecognizable as a picture. It is in fact no longer a picture, either direct or symbolic, but a *letter*, or phonetic figure. Thus, or through some other process, certain figures or combinations of figures were adopted to represent the various sounds of spoken words, and thenceforth writing was the art of recording sounds, or of *phonographing*.

We have thus arrived at an art of writing in which the sound of our spoken words is represented by figures. These figures we call the letters of the phonetic alphabet. By means of them we can convey to another with accuracy* the sound of the spoken word.

In reading, however, it may be said, one does not think of the sound of the word, but of the meaning.

This is perfectly true. For instance, we may read

phonetics. We find, however, a trace of their presence in ancient Mexican scrolls ; and phonetics gradually intermingled themselves with the radical Chinese picture-writing ; so it seems likely that the natural tendency in all nations has been from mere picturing, through picture-writing, to a phonetic alphabet.

* This accuracy is by no means considerable in English. Take for example such words as "through," "tough," and "bough." The Germans are not far wrong when they say that we write "ox" and pronounce it "ass."

and fully understand a book written in a language the true pronunciation of which we neither know nor care to know. And this fact proves that a written word may entirely take the place of the spoken word, appealing to the eye instead of the ear. Written and spoken words may therefore be considered as to all intents and purposes the same, and we may disregard the mental act of first recognizing the sound in the writing.

Our next step is to consider how these *words*, whether written or spoken, are to represent our conceptions. Now these conceptions are innumerable.

We can conceive all manner of things, not actually present to our senses, by recalling and combining memories of past sensations. Nay more, we can form ideas of what never has come, never can come, before us in a sensible shape. Have we ever seen a spirit, time, imagination, and the like? We have seen their visible results, it is true; but have we seen *them*?

How, then, are we to name them? It is a commonplace that, as Locke remarks, "Names which stand for things not under our senses have their rise from sensible ideas."* Take, for instance, the three words I have mentioned. "Spirit" originally meant a breath of air. "Time" is *tempus*—a division, a portion marked out, a limited space; as *temple* is a sacred enclosure. "Imagination" is from *imago*, a copy, a

* There are, however, as Curtius says, some abstract words (such as "know") which have not been traced back to this source.

statue, a material representation. This means that symbolism has come to our aid ; that just as in hieroglyphics a lion may stand for fire, so we allow a word representing some sensible object to stand for an idea that is conceivable by the mind, but which has never been presented to our senses.

This is the most important step that we have yet taken towards tracing the development of language into that wonderful medium of transmitting our loftiest, most subtle, and seemingly most inexpressible thoughts, our most illimitable imaginations and divinest aspirations,—a power that of all others the poet possesses.

In thus briefly sketching the development of language and letters my object has been to direct attention to certain powers of the mind, and certain corresponding methods by which we are enabled to communicate with one another.

Although it is not my purpose to formulate these thoughts too rigidly, nor to bind myself down to a systematic and logical elaboration of the question (for in striving after the form one is apt to lose what is of far greater importance), yet it may be well, once for all, to define, with an accuracy sufficient for my purpose, these powers and methods ; and I trust that what I have yet to say on the subject of art and poetic literature may prove that these definitions are not groundless.

First, we have seen that there exists a directly

pictorial, or imitative, method. In this the senses enable us to apprehend, and the understanding to classify, or comprehend, the depicted object. All that is merely imitative or delusive in art is effected by this method.

Secondly, there is the *symbolic* method. We possess the power of accepting and using a certain sign (not necessarily pictorial) as representing a certain material object *or finite feeling*. This power of symbolism is, to some extent at least, also possessed by the brutes. In art all allegory and pathos (as merely such) are results of this power.

Thirdly, there is what I would call the *poetic*,* or metaphorical, method, which is in fact an extension of the symbolic method by means of a power especially distinctive of humanity. This power is the higher Reason, by which we are conscious of ideal truth; and this ideal truth we are capable of accepting and communicating by means of symbols. All true existence, in whatever form, is due to the presence of this ideal truth; and the only true products of art, as I hope to show more clearly hereafter, are creations, or "entireties," dependent for their real existence on the *idea* which they symbolize.

It will be necessary now for me to state, as clearly as I can, what I mean by this "ideal truth."

We have all heard of the man Sanderson, who,

* Here I use "poetic" not only in its creative but in its receptive sense.

having been blind from his birth, formed a conception of a colour, not as a colour, but as a sound—comparing red to the sound of a trumpet. It is said that another, a deaf mute named Massieu, reversed the process, and compared a trumpet note to a red colour.* Who also does not know how music can excite an idea unconnected with musical sounds—such as moonlight, such as a rising sun?

And yet, what is there in red that is like the blast of a trumpet? What in Beethoven's and Haydn's music like moonlight or sunlight? Nothing in these things themselves. It is because behind all these lights and sounds there is an ideal world, of which they are but the appearances, the sensible representations, and we recognize the same *idea* in such different forms. And if I may here anticipate what I hope to insist upon more fully afterwards, it is this world of ideas in which the man of letters, and more especially the poet, must dwell, using, by direct representations and by imaginative combinations, the exterior material world of appearances as his language in order to reveal to us what Goethe calls the "open secret of nature;" "breathing forth as best he can," to use Carlyle's words, "the inspired soul of him."

This doctrine of appearances—of an outer material sensible world which exists merely as a manifestation of an "inner sphere of realities," is one which, more or less plainly stated or inferred, is to be found in

* Cf. Soph. O. T., *παῖδαν δὲ λάμπει*.

much of that literature of which I desire to treat, and in *all* that literature which merits the name of "poetic." I do not mean to say that it is expressly stated as a formal doctrine, or that it is brought before the reader in any defined theory, or parable, or other form. But, whether or not the writer presents it, or himself conceives it, formally, it underlies all that which is best and truest in literature.

And indeed it is difficult to present the thing formally. To do so one is obliged to use a parable or allegory. The fiction under which the great ideal philosopher Plato offers it is the following.

He likens the soul before birth to a charioteer and two winged horses. One horse represents the evil passions, the other our nobler affections. Led by Zeus and all the gods the chariot-souls, with clashing of wheels and the plunging of foaming steeds, circle round the dome of the sky, striving upwards toward the apse of heaven. And those who, conquering the stubborn resistance of the evil-passioned horse, reach that upper sphere gaze on the forms of divine *ideas*, or essences of things visible to the soul alone. They, dropping down once more to earth, assume an "earthly body" and become men: whereas those who are not able to reach the upper sphere, but circle in vain around the dome of the lower world, when they touch the earth, take the forms of animals. Now, when the human soul, clothed in its earthly vesture of the senses,

perceives anything on earth that is a material reflection (and all things on earth are such) of the heavenly idea, he is reminded of the celestial perfection, and he worships and adores the divinity symbolized by the idol that his senses perceive: he recognizes a divine message in the voice of nature; to him these things of earth are nothing but the form in which truth is presented to him—the shadows or reflections of that which truly exists. Such a man is the poet: he that knows this mystery and cannot reveal it to his fellow-man, is the uncreative and unrecognized poet; he that both knows it and can reveal it, who has both the vision and the faculty divine, is the complete and recognized poet.

Let me now recall to your memories some well-known lines of Wordsworth, which almost rival Plato's vision in imaginative sublimity:—

“ Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting :
 The soul that rises with us, our life's star,
 Hath had elsewhere its setting,
 And cometh from afar :
 Not in entire forgetfulness,
 And not in utter nakedness,
 But trailing clouds of glory do we come
 From God, who is our home. . . .
 The youth, who daily further from the east
 Must travel, still is Nature's priest,
 And by the vision splendid
 Is on his way attended ;
 At length the man perceives it die away,
 And fade into the light of common day. . . .

Hence, in a season of calm weather,
 Though inland far we be,
 Our souls have sight of that immortal sea
 Which brought us hither :
 Can in a moment travel thither,
 And see the children sport upon the shore,
 And hear the mighty waters rolling evermore."

The truest poet, whether he write in a metrical form or not, will ever be he who by the language that earth and all the *finite* nature of man supplies him reveals to us the inner mystery. This, as I have said, is done by a power of metaphor ; of making these finite ideas stand as symbols for what is infinite.

And here I would, for the present, leave this subject. But one point more I must touch upon ; and that is the lower faculty of the poet of transferring our thoughts by association from a material object to an emotional—but one which is still finite. I mention it here, because I wish to affirm that it is merely a means that a poet may make use of for a higher purpose, and that it is *not* a true end of poetry, as is often thought. It does *not* make use of an appearance to represent an idea, but merely by association excites certain feelings without revealing the *secret* of such feelings ; without, that is, giving that *meaning* to such feelings which make them a reality.

One of the finest examples, in any poet that I know, of this faculty of exciting an emotional feeling by mere association with material things, is the following. It is written by Walt Whitman,

the American poet ; for though many deny him the name of poet, and in the highest sense of the word he may not be one of the completest poets, yet I have no hesitation in saying that, especially in this power of associating appearances, which *tends* to draw our minds from the less to the greater, from the lower form of the finite to a higher form, he is a great poet.

He is speaking of *shapes*—material forms and shapes of things.

“The shapes arise !”

he exclaims. At once all manners of shapes and forms present themselves to us. What shape will he choose ?

“The shape measured, sawed, jacked, joined, stained.”

Why, what interest is there in this ? A piece of wood, evidently ; a plank. What do we care if it is measured ever so carefully, or sawed, or jacked, or joined, or stained ? It is nothing to us. But listen !

“The coffin shape . . . ”

Ah ! what is that ? Yes, that is something—a coffin shape ! Let us hear more :—

“The coffin shape for the dead to lie in within his shroud.”

That is a shape indeed ! Do you wish to hear of more shapes ? Here they are—

“The shape of the little trough, the shape of the rockers
beneath, the shape of the baby’s cradle ;
The shape of the floor planks ”

Planks again! what do we care about planks? Patience!

“The floor planks for the dancers’ feet.”

There is our picture! The swiftly gliding feet of the dancers, the dancers with their hearts palpitating with love, with hope, with jealousy!

Again—

“The shape of the roof of the home of the happy young man and woman, the roof over the well-married young man and woman.”

Yes, that is no mere common roof. What memories of sweet hopes, what joys and perhaps what sorrows may be associated with the shape of that roof in after years!

“The shape of the prisoner’s place in the court-room, and of him or her seated in the place :
The shape of the liquor-bar, leaned against by the young rum-drinker, and the old rum-drinker.”

Think of it! The well-worn greasy bar, leaned against by generation after generation of those who, as they lean, are sinking down lower and lower in the miry swamp of ruin and misery, soul and body. The *young* rum-drinker! Ah, who will save him? The *old*—in all his filthiness, with his blank lustreless eyes of despair, his foul breath, his steps tottering to hell!

Once again, what scenes do these words make

rise before us! What memories, what feelings they excite!

"I see the European headsman :

He stands masked, clothed in red, with huge legs and strong
naked arms,

And leans on a ponderous axe.

(Whom have you slaughtered lately, European headman?

Whose is that blood upon you, so wet and sticky?)"

While I cite these passages as examples of associative power, I am aware that Whitman's poem has a loftier scope than mere pathos. The "drift of it is something grand," as he would say; its *tendency* at least is upwards—towards some sort of ideal, if not the highest.

After what has been said, I can with less need of explanation state more definitely what I believe to be the true nature and function of literature, and our duty as students of literature.

In the first place, as regards its nature, literature, in our sense of the word, shall *not* mean all books.

It shall mean rather those writings which convey to us not facts alone, but their true meanings also: not impressions and feelings merely, but their message: not appearances solely, but ideas.

Fact-truth alone constitutes the proper domain of science, under which term we may include history: and, roughly speaking, any writing, so far as it treats a subject merely scientifically, that is with *sole* regard to fact-truth, is not literature. I do not, of course, mean to limit the word literature to imagina-

tive productions, and to exclude all historical and scientific writings, which are sometimes of high literary value ; still less should we limit the term to books in which abstract ideas are formally presented. Nor do I say that fact-truth may not be largely present in imaginative literature. Indeed, every realistic description, every natural or historical fact, used by a poet is of this nature, and constitutes a legitimate material. But what we should demand in true literature is that the writer should use these materials so as to reveal to us the *inner* meaning of the facts that he presents; and this is especially the case in the highest class of literature, namely poetry. I would therefore limit the expression, not solely to imaginative writings, but to writings which so present appearances to us that we learn somewhat at least from them of that message which it is the end of all appearance to convey.

Further, this characteristic of true literature will inevitably display itself in the language of the writer. In scientific writings the only object is to transmit facts as distinctly as possible. The more definite and clear-cut is the language, the more limited to one conception is each word, the less of metaphor, of fancy, and of imagination is admitted, so much the nearer is our object attained.

But the personal element, the bodying forth of one's inner belief, in true literature necessitates a personal character in the style of the writer. Let

us hear what one of the clearest of thinkers, himself a great master of our present English tongue, says. "While many," says Cardinal Newman, "use language as they find it, the man of genius uses it indeed, but subjects it withal to his own purposes, and moulds it according to his own peculiarities. The throng and succession of ideas, thoughts, feelings, imaginations, and aspirations which pass within him; the abstractions, juxtapositions, the comparisons, the discriminations, the conceptions, which are so original in him; his views of external things—his judgments upon life, manners, and history; the exercises of his wit, of his humour, of his depth, of his sagacity,—he images forth all these innumerable and incessant creations, the very pulsation and throbbing of his intellect,—he gives utterance to them all in a corresponding language, which is as multiform as this inward action itself, and analogous to it—the faithful expression of his own personality attending on his own inward world of thought, as its very shadow: so that we might as well say that one man's shadow is another's, as that the style of a really gifted man can belong to any but himself. It follows him about *as* a shadow. His thought and feeling are personal, and so his language is personal." "Style," says the same writer, "is a *thinking out* into language." We can as soon separate light and illumination, life and motion, the convex from the concave, as separate language from thought.

This leads us to a most important definition. In false literature (by which I do not mean scientific works and such as are *not* literature, but writings which falsely pretend to be literature) the language is not the natural outcome of an idea. Either there is no central idea at all, but it is all language,—and I think we have so-called poets nowadays who supply us with this,—or else some poor feebly glimmering idea, instead of being revealed to us by the writer, is hidden and smothered by a tangled foreign overgrowth of language springing from chance-sown thoughts, with all its weedy luxuriance of ornament, variation, and melodious inanity.

From this evil weed we must distinguish the true growth, which may perhaps be even more luxuriant, but which springs from the one central idea. In what writer, for instance, do we find a richer luxuriance of thought and language than in Shakespeare? And yet, in the midst of all this exuberance, where thought is intertwined with thought, where fancy is ever, as it were, breaking forth into a profusion of unexpected blossoms, where the wealth of imagery seems almost endless, we feel that there is a living unity present, the whole thing is an entirety. The great stem is there, rooted fast in the ground, and well capable of sustaining its mass of foliage. Do we not feel the same to be true also in music? What more inane and hateful than the ordinary “firework” variations by which one is so often tortured? What more true,

more lovely, and yet more exuberant than Beethoven's or Schubert's variations ?

The power of elaboration is indeed by no means the least considerable power possessed by the artist. None but the true artist can accomplish it, for on *his* mind has been photographed, so to speak, the idea, and this can never be altered, although its latent details, its densities and transparencies, its half and full shades, may be developed. He, too, knows how to stay the development when there is a fear of clouding the picture.

All the greatest artists possess this power. Dante's divine poem made him "lean" for many years. The "Mona Lisa" of Leonardo occupied him, if I remember right, some eight years. Goethe speaks of such elaboration, and sharply defines the false from the true: "The mode of altering and improving, where by continued invention the imperfect is developed into the perfect, is the right one ; but the remaking and carrying further what is already complete, that I cannot commend." As in Michael Angelo's block of marble—the perfect statue lies imbedded there : all our work must be an attempt to unveil it from its formless *matrix*.

With two short remarks I shall leave this subject.

First, if style be as the shadow of a man, we must not make it our aim to acquire a certain writer's style. The shadow must be *ours* ; as Browning says (though in a different sense)—

“Measure your mind’s height by the shade it casts.”

We cannot, therefore, approve of an acquired style or language, even in the case of the archaic diction of Herodotus, Lucretius, or Spenser.

Secondly, if the language and the thought must be so exquisitely fitted one to the other, so inseparable, what have we to say to translations?

It is true, that there do exist magnificent translations. Take our English Bible for instance. Consider the enthusiastic sonnet of Keats to the honour of Chapman, translator of Homer. But on the other hand is it, as some affirm, a test of a great work that it should be translatable?—and into *all* languages? Must we deny the greatness of Plato’s writings because they could not be worthily translated into the Bushman’s language? To sum up the matter, let us hear Newman once more: “In proportion as ideas are novel and recondite they would be difficult to put into words, and the very fact of their having *insinuated* themselves into one language would diminish the chance of that happy accident being repeated in another.”

The exquisite felicity of expression which is natural to the true poet, receives an unconscious approbation from us by our adopting his phrases into the language of common life. If we read through a play of Shakespeare’s, such as “Hamlet,” we shall be astonished at the extraordinary number that it contains of what we call “common expressions;”

expressions that have been adopted by us into our everyday language. The language of a great poet, expressing what all feel but none else can so well say, passes into the proverbs of a people. Our common speech (it has been finely said) is inlaid with these rich fragments, as in Italy we see the fragments of old mosaics and sculptures let into the common modern masonry of walls and houses.

And now, lastly, what is the *message* that literature has for us? And in what manner shall we receive this message?

"The whole," says Fichte, "of the training and culture which an age calls learned education, is only a means towards the attainable portion of the Divine Idea, and is only valuable in so far as it actually *is* such a means, and truly fulfils its purpose."

Education! Is this that Fichte means the same "education" of which we hear so much nowadays—the panacea for all crime and misery?

"Who is the genuine man of letters?" asks Carlyle. A Greek poet may answer him: he is the διδάσκαλος, the teacher.* What then shall he teach? The modern philosopher shall answer that. "Men of letters are a perpetual priesthood, from age to age teaching men that a God is still present in their life; that all appearance, whatsoever we see in the

* τοῖς μὲν γὰρ παιδαρίοισιν
ἔστι διδάσκαλος ὅστις φράζει, τοῖς ἡβῶσιν δὲ ποιηταί.

Ar. Ran., 1054.

world, is but as a vesture for the Divine Idea—for that which lies at the bottom of appearance."

His it is, also, to elicit our *worship* of the true. "He who in any way shows us better than we knew before that a lily of the field is beautiful . . . he has sung for us, *made us sing with him*, a little verse of a sacred psalm. How much more he who sings, who says, or in any way brings home to our heart the noble doings, feelings, darings and endurances of a brother man! He has verily touched our hearts as with a live coal from *the altar*. Perhaps there is no worship more authentic."

A wondrous power indeed has this teacher! And as he more clearly than others can reveal to us, can make us love and worship, what is divine and true and lovely, so the false teacher possesses a terrible power to reveal to us *as* divine and true what is false and utterly hateful. Terrible indeed is his power, terrible his crime. One melodious line of a poet, the music of which creeps into one's soul and chimes there ever after—one melodious line, I say, insinuating into our soul a falsity or a loathsomeness, a lie and an abomination—what has not that line done? Done what the writer with all his genius and creative power can never again undo.

And we, the students, of what manner of mind we should be? "He only shall be esteemed a scholar," says Fichte, "who through the learned culture of his age has attained a knowledge of the Divine

Idea, or at least strives with life and strength to obtain it."

It is with sole regard to the attainment of such knowledge that I wish (presumptuous as the wish may be) to speak of poetry. All beside this—all things antiquarian, philological, grammatical, biographical, or chronological, however interesting and necessary, shall be considered of secondary importance. For I would rather that any words of mine should help a man, a woman, or child, to recognize the deep meaning of a single poetic thought, than that they should be even to the very highest degree conducive to the acquisition of a merely technical knowledge of poetic literature.

"If the striving," Fichte continues, "is after the outward form, the mere letter; then we have—if the whole circle of knowledge be completed—the complete *bungler*; if unfinished—the progressive *bungler*."

And yet "who loves not knowledge? Who shall rail against her beauty?" Certainly not such an one as Fichte. For it is not against the beauty of knowledge that he rails, but against the idolatry of knowledge.

"Let her know her place :
She is the second, not the first.
A higher hand must make her mild,
If all be not in vain ; and guide
Her footsteps, moving side by side
With wisdom, like the younger child."

He who with Paracelsus feels—

“I still must hoard, and heap, and class all truths
With one ulterior object. I must *know* ;”

or with Wagner, in “Faust,” would exclaim, “Zwar weiss ich viel, doch möcht’ ich Alles wissen”—he is not a student, he is the progressive bungler. And yet how lofty is even such an idolatry in comparison with that of him who sets up as his object, his idol, not the inanity of mere knowledge, but the gross object of material prosperity. The tendency of the present day—with its self-sufficient mock-virtuous positivism on the one hand, and on the other its refined æsthetic sensualism (to say nothing of coarser and perhaps less dangerous types)—its tendency is to laugh at ideals.

“Give us something real and tangible!” it cries. “What do we care for Divine Ideas, and the like? If we are to devote our lives to toil, to rise up early and late take rest, to live huddled together in the smoke and filth of great cities, we must have some practicable solid satisfactory object to attain.”

Now, without entering upon the question of religious ideals (while I would class together the man who looks upon religion as a necessary social accomplishment and him who sees in art merely a means of æsthetic enjoyment, or of furnishing tastefully his gilded drawing-room and library), I distinctly affirm it to be my belief that what most *satisfies*, what most

elevates and refines a man's character, broadens his sympathies, deepens his faith, and reveals to him truths far more quenching to the thirst of the soul than the floods of riches—secrets that are “writ in the golden stars,” in the earth, in sea, and in the nature of man,—that this is not so much the rare and often peace-destroying possession of poetic genius, but that “deep poetic heart” which all of us may gain if we will, and the possession of which the favourite poet of the present time has told us is

“More than all poetic fame.”

The greatest philosopher of antiquity banished poetry from his ideal republic. I hope on another occasion to weigh fully the indictment that he brings against it. For the present it is enough to say that the accusation lies chiefly in these two points: first, that as an *imitative* art it deals not with realities but with appearances; secondly, that by constantly harping on our heart-strings, by exciting our emotions to no purpose, it renders unnaturally sensitive, and at the same time weakens the feelings. Now, true as this charge may be when brought against a certain class of so-called poetry and art (and I fear that by far the greater amount of modern literature—to say nothing of modern plays, and modern pictures—comes under this class), it is our duty, if we are not to acquiesce in the severe sentence of banishment passed by Plato on poetry, to acquit her of these charges; and while attempting to accomplish this,

I quote in conclusion for my own encouragement the recommendation to mercy pronounced by the same stern but just arbiter.

After saying that the sentence of exile must remain in force against poetry until she has herself made a satisfactory defence in lyrical or other measure, he adds,* “and we shall also allow those of her patrons who are lovers of poetry without being poets to advocate her cause *in prose*, by maintaining that poetry is not only pleasurable, but profitable in its bearings upon government and upon human life; and we shall listen to them favourably. For we shall, I believe, be gainers if this can be proved.”

It is with the sole object of attempting this defence of poetry that I shall in the next chapter venture to discuss the nature of art; for I believe that poetry, when it is true poetry,—and not only poetry, but all art—is, if rightly understood and used, not merely the minister of *pleasure*, the exciter of meaningless and enervating emotions, the mover of “idle tears,” or the source of æsthetic raptures, but that it is *profitable*, not in a meagre Utilitarian sense, but in a sense of the word which would satisfy Plato himself.

* Rep. x. 607.

CHAPTER II.

ART CREATION.

IN the last chapter I endeavoured to trace the rise and the development of the written language, to show how various kinds of alphabets first arose, and how finally true letters represented the sounds of speech. We also considered recorded language in its widest meaning, and then limited our definition of true literature to that which, by the medium of recorded words, presents to us in some form or other *ideas*.

On the present occasion I wish to say first a few words about the nature and object of *Art*, and then to show, as well as I can, some of the methods by which the Poet attains the object of *his* art; and to contrast these methods with those used by the Painter and Sculptor.

First, therefore, while philosophy treats of ideas without forms, and science gives us forms without ideas (these two methods being often combined), the function of art is to *produce forms that shall represent*

ideas; and such artistic form is an "entirety," real by virtue of the idea that it reveals.

This definition of art, though it may not seem to be so, is radically different from and subversive of the definition that has been given by several great thinkers, and which is repeated and accepted nowadays with such *naïveté* by those who do not see that by so doing they are confirming the most just verdict of banishment passed on such art by Plato.

Shortly stated, the two opposing definitions are the following—1. Art creates—its end is to reveal. 2. Art reproduces, *i.e.* imitates—its end is pleasure.

You will find that the view taken of art varies, in those who have any right to be called thinkers, with their philosophy. Let us hear what some of these have to say.

First, as I have already shown, Plato, accepting the ordinary definition—that of imitation, and pleasure,—excommunicates poetry as not only worthless but dangerous. And justly he does so; for, if we accept his premiss, poetry (and what he says of poetry applies equally to all art) *should* be banished from our lives. You remember, however, that, after pronouncing sentence, he still yearns towards her, and would fain recall the verdict if only she could be cleared of the charges brought against her. Let us therefore examine these charges.

Plato assumes as his premiss that art imitates nature. In this imitation, he says, "the author is

twice removed from the thing as it was created ;" that is, he imitates an object which is itself *only* a representation, an imitation, of the truth which it represents. The natural object, standing exactly where it is in the order of things, fulfils its end. Taken out of that order of things, unconnected with the idea that it thus and there represents, it is like a dismembered branch. Stuck in the ground, it looks like a living thing for a time, but has no root and withers away—a dead stock. Life consists in unity. It is the One in the Many. A thing that is not an entirety is dead. Imitations from nature are not entireties.

Now our sole appeal against this is that art does *not* imitate. Its function does *not* lie in reproducing a likeness (however cleverly copied) on canvas, in marble, or in words. The worth of a picture, as a work of art, does not consist in its illusive qualities. It is no test of worth that (as was related of a production by Zeuxis) grapes should be so wonderfully reproduced that birds should peck at them, nor that a horse should neigh at his painted fellow horse. The study of nature is useful merely for the acquisition of material. The most laborious and clever reproduction of nature is in itself merely an accumulation of material, to be used perhaps by the accumulator, but more probably by the artist who appropriates the savings of these collectors, and builds with the materials brought together by these "hodmen" of art. Thus we see such poets as Dante and Shakespeare

making use of forms that they found already to hand—re-creating them with a new life. Indeed Goethe, seeing that “art is long and life short,” actually advises the adoption of themes already worked up. In the “Faust” he has made Mephistopheles sing, as his serenade beneath the window of Margaret, a song which is almost a literal translation of Ophelia’s “Good morrow, ’tis Saint Valentine’s day ;” and, in speaking to Eckermann on the subject, he asks, “Why should I give myself the trouble to compose a new song when Shakespeare’s was exactly the right thing, saying just what was required ?” This principle of recreation is of course a very different thing from a dead eclecticism. “Facts and characters,” he also says, “being provided, the poet has only the task of animating the whole.” And he goes on to state that the “knowledge of the world,” as well as the “region of love, hate, hope, despair, or by whatever other names you call the moods and passions of the soul,” are innate with the poet, and he “needs not much experience or observation to represent them adequately.” At the same time, if he wishes to escape criticism for offending against fact-truth he must have recourse to experience or tradition ; “for it is not born with him to know, for instance, how courts are held, or how a parliament or a coronation is managed.”

I cannot but think that the results of the theory of imitation (or, perhaps, the disregard of all theories)

as seen in our modern galleries, theatres, and literature, is of the most deplorable character. Every one who has naturally, or has acquired, any skill in imitation but who may possess no artistic power whatsoever—dubs himself with the name of artist, and is accredited as such.

Our academies are filled with clever studies from nature, and tricks of colour, exceedingly ingenious and admirable as materials for a picture; and the more clever is the effect produced the greater is the market value of the painting. In the theatres, too, we find all the materials for a great drama: dazzling scenery, passions, stirring events, copied directly from nature in the most glowing colours—passions and scenery and events that in nature might be full of meaning, but are now utterly meaningless—endeavouring to simulate an appearance of life and reality by their gorgeous dress, like those bedecked and bejewelled corpses which the poet Morris describes in his "Earthly Paradise" as sitting amid regal splendour at their banquet.

Perhaps it may have occurred to some, as an objection to what I have said, that Shakespeare speaks of "holding up the mirror to nature." This expression (which is also used by Plato) is often quoted in support of the theory of imitation in art. If you will examine the context you will find that, firstly, the poet is speaking of *playing* and not of composing a part, and, secondly, that he explains

the expression to mean that we should "show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image;" that is, that we should create forms and images in which such *ideas* shall be recognized—not merely that we should copy material forms of things. Another expression of Shakespeare's, though it specially applies to the "art" of propagating varieties of plants, may be taken in a more general sense.

"Yet nature is made better by no mean,
But nature makes that mean : so o'er that art,
Which you say adds to nature, is an art
That nature makes."

By this he wishes us to infer, as it seems to me, that the product of the artist's mind is a real growth, no less real than are the products of the laws of nature—no less real than the "streaked gillyvors;" and is, in this sense, "made by nature." It is an existence in the great order of things. But it by no means follows that it is therefore subject to what we loosely call *natural laws*, as we shall see a little later.

We may dismiss this question of imitation by the remark of Goethe, who says truly that, "Art is called art, just because it is *not* nature."

Let us now look to "pleasure." Mankind may roughly be divided into two great classes, to which every one, consciously or unconsciously, belongs—those who look on pleasure or happiness (or whatever other more etherialized name you like to give it) as an end in itself, and those who do *not*. It may

be that we are predestined to such a notion—that it is innate in us,—but, however this may be, the principle involved is that which lies at the root of all our character and our views of life. It would be utterly idle and presumptuous of me to attempt to treat this question with a hope of convincing those who differ from me ; for to convince them would mean to change entirely their mode of looking at things—to change their inborn character by a syllogism. But as regards art, if we once allow that its function is imitation, we must also allow that its end is mere pleasure. We therefore naturally find philosophers, such as Aristotle, who define poetry as “truthful imitation,” and even Bacon, who allows that art aims at a “more ample greatness” than can be seen in nature, and gives poetry the name of “imaginative fiction,” and the “theatre of the mind,” and all those who seek for a true end in material objects—all utilitarians, hedonists, and the like, as well as the followers of the modern sickly æstheticism—and, besides these, others who profess lofty religious ideals, but who draw a charmed circle, outside of which they will recognize no revelation,—all these, we find, tell us that the end of art is to give pleasure—inno-cent, healthy, bracing pleasure perhaps, but nothing higher than pleasure.

“I would define,” says the American poet, Poe, “the poetry of words as the rhythmical creation of beauty. Its sole arbiter is Taste. With the intellect

or with the conscience it has only collateral relations. Unless accidentally, it has no concern with Duty or Truth."

Now I would dare to affirm, in opposition to this, that poetry is the creation of a reality, real by virtue of the ideal truth that it represents ; and that its sole arbiter is not taste, but our sense of ideal truth or perfection, to whose verdict we shall find that both taste and understanding must bow.

But are we not to love a thing simply for its beauty? Must we always be extracting a moral from such things? Emphatically—no. Indeed, to endeavour to formulate and define to ourselves in words or thought the idea brought to us is merely to transfer it to another form, whereas we ought to accept it in the form in which it comes, whether as a thing of beauty appealing to us through our senses, or otherwise.

I must, however, state more fully what I mean by that beauty of which Taste is the sole arbiter.

The qualities in things that attract or repel us—beauty and unloveliness,—whether they consist in certain combinations of sensible things, or of a "proportion" of which these things are the expressed numbers,—whatever these qualities are, they act on us through *a sense* just in the same way as colour, or size, is brought to us by the senses. We can classify things as beautiful or repulsive by what we call our sense of beauty in the same way as we classify things

as red or green by our sense of colour. And the mere mention of such things as a Hottentot Venus, an African lip-ring, Arabian music, even the different styles of admired personal beauty and dress in more civilized countries, or the infatuation of a lover, or a parent,—all these will show that there may be beauty blindness as well as colour-blindness ; that, in fact, such beauty is only subjective.

This beauty is only one of the accidents, as they are called, of material existence, just as greenness, redness, heaviness, and the like ; and the fact that it excites our emotions and attracts us is to be classed with other natural facts, such as those consequent on the law of gravity, or of capillary attraction.

Taste, if I am not mistaken, is not to be the sole arbiter, but our higher Reason, which discerns the ideal truth of a representation, and in whose verdict the taste and understanding must acquiesce.

Let us see whether this is a mere groundless theory, or whether we can prove it by an example. The poet Horace, while he allows that “painters and poets always have the liberty of making whatever audacious creations they please,” limits his permission thus: “But you must not place a woman’s head on a horse’s neck, clothe the body in feathers, and make it end in a fish’s tail.” Now, to omit at present the question of painting, such a combination as this has actually been made by Dante in his monster Geryon, “a beast with a pointed tail, with serpent’s body, and

hairy paws, with sides painted with scales and bosses, and with a face like the face of a just man." Geryon is the symbol of Fraud, and though utterly monstrous and abhorrent to our understanding is approved of by higher reason. He is no falsity; he is true to the meaning that the poet wishes to convey. He represents Fraud more effectually perhaps than any incarnation that our senses have ever perceived.

In this case taste also—the sense by which we are attracted or repelled from an object—must give way.

For what are we to say to this same hideous Geryon? What to all unlovely things? Are these to be unfit material for the poet, because our sense of the beautiful is repelled by them?

If we allow this sense—this *æsthesis*—to estimate poetry, she will disallow much that reason justly allows; she will make us mawkish and sensual, lovers of a school of poetry and painting which nowadays is only too seductive, with its graceful, languid effeminacy and voluptuousness.

And yet, as in that divinest of Plato's dialogues, the *Phædrus*, Socrates veils his head in horror at having been induced to speak words of blasphemy against Love and Beauty, and hastens forthwith to offer reparation in a glorious palinode, so would I hasten to speak, as best I can, of a beauty, and a love for beauty, infinitely removed from sensuous idols and emotions: a beauty inseparable from eternal truth, and one with it; a loveliness which we can love and adore

as well as recognize; than which adoration and love, as Carlyle has told us, no worship is more authentic. If, therefore, we are to allow a love for beauty to judge of poetry, and the creation of the beautiful to be the end of poetry, we must separate this love wholly from the mere sense of material beauty, from our taste or æsthesis, from our sensitiveness to attractive forms. We must, in fact, be strong enough to receive the new gospel of love; and then we may enthrone love above all mere duty, all mere recognition of truth. In this sense of the word I think we may entirely agree with what sounds almost a paradox of Goethe's: "The beautiful," he says, "is higher than the good: the beautiful includes the good"—the truly beautiful, that is, which, as Carlyle quaintly says, "differs from the false, as heaven differs from Vauxhall." With this higher meaning of beauty in our minds, we can now without scruple say that in all art, and in poetry especially, the struggle or aspiration towards supernal loveliness or perfection is the only true motive: and this harmonizes exactly with what before we defined as the object of the true poet—namely, to reveal the secret of nature; for that secret *is* ideal loveliness, beauty and harmony lying at the heart of all existence.

Now that I have tried to explain what I hold to be the true end of art (and I would here repeat that such theories are of merely subjective value), let us turn to the more practical side of the question, and consider the *nature* of an art creation, and some of

the methods by which the poet effects his end ; and also contrast to some extent these with other artistic methods—such as those of painting and sculpture ; merely premising here that each art (as, indeed, every other agency) has its special powers and its peculiar sphere, within which it will find its highest development ; whereas, if it invade another sphere and endeavour to usurp other methods than its own (as is often the case in, for instance, allegorical painting, picturesque poetry, and perhaps also in the uses to which music is put, both on the stage and in the church), then it abandons and loses its own special powers.

First, let us consider the poetic form of thought, the *habit* of mind with which a poet approaches, and grasps, and models his subject ; and then the minor question of the material in which he finally presents his creation—that is, his language, metre, rhyme, and the like.

“The appropriate business of poetry,” says Wordsworth, “is to treat of things, not as they are, but as they appear, not as they exist of themselves, but as they *seem* to exist to the senses and to the passions.” Shelley, too, calls poetry “the record of the best and happiest moments of the best and happiest minds.” That is true. It is the record of a mind. Does he mean the record of mere emotion, the record of the mental state, or of passion ? Does he say that ? No. It is the record of a mind

in its happiest, best, most tranquil moments, when mere personal self-centred emotion has passed ; when reason and the diviner perceptions have regained their sway ; when the turbid stream has clarified itself. Therefore we find Wordsworth once more defining poetry as the record of "emotion recollected in tranquillity." I cannot but think that Dante's words have a similar meaning—namely, that the impression made by emotion on his mind was recollected and sung of by him in after, more tranquil, moments :—

"Io mi son un, che quando
Amore spira, noto : ed a quel modo
Ch' ei detta dentro, vo significando" (*Purg.* 24. 52).

"I am one who, whensoever Love inspires me, mark it ; and in that measure which he dictates within me, singing go."

At the moment when we are under the influence of deep emotion, when our heart is overflowing with sorrow, with joy, or with indignation, we are apt to lose sight of the inner meanings of these things. The sorrow, the joy, is everything to us ; the mere emotion is everything ; the true meaning of what has fallen to our lot is not recognized.

Now, when the feelings are in this turbid untranquilized state, we can indeed, by the display of our inconsolable grief, our inexpressible happiness, or even by the display of self-restraint and stoic indifference, excite the *sympathy* of others in these feelings. Tender and loving such sympathy often is

—but it cannot wholly satisfy. We must, and when the storm of passion has ceased we shall, lift our eyes higher than to human sympathy.

It is by exciting sympathy with such passionate emotions, whether of grief, joy, or anger, that the poet is *pathetic*. If he merely excites that sympathy, and does not use the hold that he has obtained on our attention to point beyond these finite human passions to the mystery that they contain, then he only presents us with *pathos*; and all merely sensational pathetic pictures presented to us by the poet or painter are in themselves contemptible, and blunt our diviner perceptions. Among these I would class most of the modern plays that draw such multitudes to our theatres, a great many of our modern pictures, and, not to speak of poems, almost all the common novels of the day.

Now, the true poet will make use of all such past emotions and thoughts, clarified by time; just as the painter will use a thousand memories, clustering them into his picture, till we sometimes feel that such a combination of loveliness or grandeur was never seen by us in nature. Yet it is not *unnatural*. It is *præternatural*. It is an *addition* to nature. It is nevertheless true to its meaning, and our reason does not stumble at it. Goethe speaks of a picture by Rubens thus: "So perfect a picture has never been seen in nature; we are indebted for its *composition* to the painter's poetic mind."

Composition, combination, synthesis,—yes, this power of composition is the peculiar power of the poet ; indeed “poetic” power means nothing more or less than the power of composition. It is in its nature the exact converse of analysis—of the method that science uses. Although there is no occasion to rave against this method of analysis, and its empirical followers, as Wordsworth does, exclaiming—

“O there is laughter at their work in heaven ;”

nor with him need we be indignant, even if a botanist should pluck a flower from his mother’s grave to assure himself of its genus : yet, as I shall try to show later, this analytical tendency of the mind *is* eminently unpoetic.

For the future, to signify this poetic quality let us accept a word that is commonly used to express (though it does that poorly) the synthetic, combining power of the mind—Imagination.

“The lunatic, the lover, and the poet
Are of imagination all compact : . . .
The poet’s eye in a fine frenzy rolling
Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven ;
And, as imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown, the poet’s pen
Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing
A local habitation and a name.”

“Such tricks,” adds Shakespeare, “hath strong imagination.”

Let us here consider, in reference to art, of what

nature these "tricks" are, and how far allowable. We have seen before that they must not offend our higher reason, our sense of the meaning of things. What limits will our arbiter Reason allow to imagination?

The authors of that remarkable book, the "Unseen Universe," use (if I remember aright) a phrase that may possibly make my answer more intelligible. Speaking of the continuity of natural laws, of cause and effect, they allow that there is no objective certainty as to that continuity; that, in fact, miracles are possible. But they affirm that certainty does exist that by the discontinuance of such laws we shall not be "utterly put to confusion," so that all life should *lose its meaning*.* In like manner, a poetic fiction, a breach of fact-truth, must not put us utterly to confusion. It must not be meaningless. If an idea is revealed to us, reason does not stumble at the tricks that imagination may play in creating the artistic form.

Now, some writers will tell us that a peculiarity of imaginative poetry is that it is "arbitrary." This is false. Imagination is not arbitrary: it has laws of its own. Listen to what Goethe says. I cannot but transcribe the passage. It is from Eckermann's "Gespräche mit Goethe." He and the great German

* Compare what Dante says (Par. 8. 100): "Not only are the natures of things pre-ordained in that mind which is perfect in itself, but they *together with their conservation*."

poet are discussing the above-mentioned picture by Rubens.

"How has Rubens produced this beautiful effect?" asked Goethe.

"By making these light figures stand out against a dark ground," said I.

"But whence comes this dark ground?"

"It is the powerful shadow," said I, "thrown by a cluster of trees towards the figures. But what is this?" I continued with surprise; "why, the figures throw their shadows *into* the picture, while the grove of trees on the contrary cast theirs outwards, towards the spectator! We have therefore light from two different points, which is utterly contrary to nature."

"That is just the point," replied Goethe, with a smile. "It is by this that Rubens proves his greatness, and shows that he is superior to nature, and treats her conformably with his lofty purposes. The double light is certainly a violent expedient, and, you say, contrary to nature. Well, if it *is* contrary to nature, I affirm that it is superior to nature: I say that it is a bold stroke of the master artist . . . by which he proclaims that art is not wholly subject to natural requirements, but *has laws of its own*."

I am aware with what scorn and ridicule any theory is nowadays treated which suggests the possibility of "improving nature:" nor do I acquiesce in Goethe's *dictum*, that the artist may be superior to nature. Further, it seems to me (though I do not

know the picture) that the device of introducing a double light into an ordinary landscape with the sole object of obtaining a dark background is a sign of littleness rather than of greatness.

At the same time, this denial of the subservience of art to natural laws, this declaration of its autonomy by one of the greatest of artists and deepest of thinkers, merits the notice of those whose one essential maxim is fidelity to nature.

I would rather choose and adapt Shakespeare's words to express what I conceive to be the truth—namely, that art “shares with great creating nature :” that it “adds to nature.” In other words, that in creative energy art is equipollent with (not superior to) nature, subjecting herself of free accord to natural laws when they serve her purpose, but ever preserving her independence ; that true works of art are *additions* to the sum of phenomena ; and these art creations are not necessarily conditioned by what we call natural laws, inasmuch as imagination has laws of its own to which it may subject its creations. Such works of art are true existencies—as true as any natural existence—by virtue of the idea that they represent.

Such a power as this possessed by art is veritably *creative* ; and this is not only the case when the new existence is conditioned by other than natural laws but when it is subjected to these laws. Nay more, even when instead of producing a new existence the artist accepts the ordinary natural objects (visible,

intellectual, or emotional), and so reveals their meaning that he converts them for us into true existencies—even this is an act of creation. In order, however, to distinguish this act from the imaginative creation of a new form, I shall venture to term the former “recreation.” On a later occasion I hope to bring forward Wordsworth’s poems as an example of this recreative power.

And here, in order that my oft-repeated statement that a true work of art is a reality, no less real than natural objects, may not remain a mere phrase, I must endeavour to explain a little more fully what I mean ; though I am aware that it is a truth which needs realization and is incapable of full explanation.

Such facts as the existence of the sensible universe, or the occurrence of past events, do not seem to me to be subjects of *belief*—not at least of belief in the highest sense of the word. It has always proved a stumbling-block to me that at times we are expected almost in one breath to declare our *belief* in two such different things as the existence of God and a historical event. Phenomena are only then real when they reveal a truth as an object of belief ; their sole reality consists in this revelation.

Now, if this be true, surely many a work of art is as *real* as any such fact ; and often far more real than thousands of phenomena which we perceive, but the meaning of which we never learn.

Is an isolated fact of history, is the appearance

of a natural object (for example, a star, a mountain, a fellow-man, or a phase of human feeling), necessarily more of a reality to one than an event or character or scene presented to us by Shakespeare or Sophocles or Wordsworth? What can be more real to us, in this sense of the word, than the events (whether or not historically true) of the "Iliad," of Shakespeare's plays, of "Wilhelm Tell," of the "Electra," or the "Oedipus Rex"? Who is it that is more real to us than Cordelia, or Hamlet, or Coriolanus, or Raphael's Gran Duca and Sistine Madonnas, or the Christ in Leonardo's "Cenacolo," or many another creation of art? What scenes of nature are more real to us than those which we find in the "Childe Harold," or in Turner's pictures? What flowers and stars are more real than those which Wordsworth has recreated for us? And even when art gives us a præternatural creation, one not conditioned by natural laws, is this not still true? Think of Ariel, of the Inferno and the Paradise, of Shelley's visions! Surely these are real to us in a sense that many sensible objects and historical events are not. It may be objected that natural facts prove their exclusive reality by the effects that they produce in nature. The slightest motion of a material object changes (it is said) the earth's centre of gravity, the slightest act or feeling exerts an influence through all future ages, whereas a poetic event or object has no such result.

But I think we may say that this is so because

works of art lie in what Spinoza would call an "attribute parallel to," but different from that of natural things, being conditioned not by the laws of nature, but by those of the imagination.

"The artist," Goethe further remarks, "would speak to the world by means of an *entirety*; but that entirety he does not find in nature." *

Now, this "entirety," of which Goethe speaks, is compassed by the poet's imagination in various ways. Its most daring act is to conceive a distinct breach in a natural law. Thus Dante produces a startling effect, and one that adds much to the entirety of the poetic conception, by stating that, as he ascended the mount of Purgatory, those who met him fled in fear at his *shadow*; for they, though substantial to the eye, were of that pure ethereal stuff that did not "break the sunlight." Again, when he stepped into the boat of Phlegyas on the infernal river, though it also contained Virgil and the ferrymen—both of them shades,—"it only then," he says, "appeared loaded when I was in it." This is one right claimed by the poet—to break a law of nature.

A second, less daring method, is to form a combination of natural effects, with no obtrusive con-

* "Organism," which is used by some to express the vital unity of an art creation, seems to me to be misleading on account of the special meaning to which it is ordinarily limited. Notice that no dogma or theoretic statement is an entirety. Truth can be revealed, but cannot be stated. See quotation from Shakespeare in the Preface.

travention of a natural law, but producing what we might call an unnatural, or rather a *præternatural* picture. Of this, of course, we have innumerable examples. Many scenes in a poem such as Milton's are instances. Take one from Dante—where the scene itself is supernatural, but where a certain natural law is so far from being suspended that it is the chief factor in producing the imaginative effect. He has arrived at the centre of the earth in his infernal wanderings. Here, in eternal ice, Satan is fixed, and, in order to pass out of the lowest circle of the Inferno, the poets are obliged to clamber down his shaggy side. Dante, for support, clings to the neck of Virgil, and he—

“ Laid fast hold upon the shaggy sides ;
From fell to fell descended downward then
Between the thick hair and the frozen crust.
When we were come to where the thigh revolves
Exactly on the thickness of the haunch,
The Guide, with labour and with hard-drawn breath,
Turned round his head where he had had his legs,
And grappled to the hair, as one who mounts,
So that to Hell I thought we were returning.”
(*Inf.* 34. 73, Longf. tr.)

That is how Dante describes the passing of the centre of the earth. It is a highly imaginative employment of what to Dante was a law of nature, viz., the centripetal law, for a poetical purpose.

Another method is that of representing objects, feelings, scenes, and other natural phenomena as

they actually may occur in nature. But the poetic picture is no mere transcript ; it is a composition effected by what I have termed recreative power. In a transcript the writer exercises only a power of description of appearance, and the result is meaningless, and therefore lifeless, being cut off from its vital connections, whereas by the act of composition an entirety is produced capable of revealing its idea. Take as an instance the first stanza from Keats' "Eve of St. Agnes:"—

"Saint Agnes' Eve,—ah, bitter cold it was !
 The owl, for all his feathers, was a-cold :
 The hare limped trembling through the frozen grass,
 And silent was the flock in woolly fold :
 Numb were the Beadsman's fingers, while he told
 His rosary, and while his frosted breath,
 Like pious incense from a censer old,
 Seemed taking flight for heaven without a death,
 Past the sweet Virgin's picture, while his prayer he saith."

Here is a similar scene from Shakespeare—one from which, indeed, Keats may have unconsciously borrowed :—

"When icicles hang by the wall,
 And Dick the shepherd blows his nail,
 And Tom bears logs into the hall,
 And milk comes frozen home in pail,
 When blood is nipped, and ways be foul,
 Then nightly sings the staring owl—
 Tu whit :
 Tu-who, a merry note,
 While greasy Joan doth keel the pot."

In these passages it is not description but composition that produces the picture for us.

In the description of appearance poetry is a rival of painting, and must abandon her peculiar powers. Suppose, for instance, that a painter and a poet vied with each other to describe minutely a certain flower. Both would copy it with Dutch fidelity, describing stem, calyx, petals, stamens, and all the rest, with their proper colours and forms. So far the two—the man of words and the man of paints—are on tolerably even terms.

But now let them present their respective works to us.

The painter's picture, every detail grouped into one whole, flashes instantaneously upon the eye. In a moment we see the flower standing there before us as it might have existed at some moment of its existence. The poet's picture, on the contrary, is gradually unfolded to us by a succession of sounds. Each detail fades away before the next, and our memory feebly endeavours to group these details into a whole.

For an example let us take the description of Helen of Troy, written in Greek verse by a Greek scholar of the twelfth century, Constantius Manasses.

“She was a very beautiful woman, with lovely eyebrows and complexion,
With beautiful cheeks and face, ox eyes, snow-white skin ;
Dark-eyed, tender, a grove full of charms ;

White-armed, delicate, breathing beauty undisguised :
 The complexion fair, the cheek rosy,
 The countenance pleasing, the eye beautiful :
 Inartificial loveliness, undyed, natural :
 A glowing rose colour tinged her whiteness,
 As if one should dye ivory with splendid purple :
 Long-necked, dazzling white, whence she was often called
 Swan-born lovely Helen.”*

In like manner Ariosto labours to give us an elaborate picture of the enchantress Alcina. He devotes five stanzas to it ; describes her hair, cheek, forehead, teeth, lips, bosom, neck, arms, hands, feet. What is the result ? Compare with Alcina, and with the Helen of Manasses, the original Helen of Troy—“divine among women,”—or Nausicaa, as described by Homer. Described, do I say ? Homer in all his *Odyssey* and *Iliad* has never described them at all except by incidentally calling them “white-armed” and “fair-haired.” And Miranda, Juliet, Imogen,—where have we found their pictures ?

The first who enunciated a formal distinction between the pictorial arts (and he rather loosely classes sculpture and painting together under this head) and poetry, was the German poet and critic Lessing. Before his time, not only in Germany, but in France and England, the maxim “*Ut pictura poesis*” had been almost universally accepted ; so much so that it was considered to be a test of a real poem whether or not it afforded material for a painter.

* Quoted by Lessing. Translated by Sir R. Phillimore.

Lessing takes as his text the well-known group of sculpture called the "Laocoon." You all know the story. The priest of Apollo had warned the Trojans against admitting the wooden horse into the city. Two huge serpents emerge from the sea and attack the sons of the priest. He hastens to their rescue, only to be involved in the coils of the deadly reptiles; and dies in agony, uttering terrible shrieks. Thus is the scene described by the Roman poet Virgil.

How does the sculptor represent it?

It had been shown by Winckelmann, another great German critic, that in sculpture a single moment—the moment of chief intensity—is seized, and that all is concentrated into that moment. Consider yourselves: what moment would you seize, if you wished to portray in sculpture the leap of Sappho; Hercules in his agony, hurling the priest Lachas into the sea; or any such energetic intense act such as the sculptor often chooses? You would select a critical moment, in which there is no *dispersion* of intensity and energy: not a moment when the act is actually *being* done—but a moment into which you could concentrate everything. Consistently with this, Winckelmann states that "the expression in the figures of Greek sculpture, under every form of passion, shows a great and self-collected soul." He affirms that Laocoon, in this group, is concentrating all his energies on the death-struggle, that though his mouth is open, he is *not* represented, as Virgil represents him, uttering a long

terrific shriek. Winckelmann blames Virgil for describing this shriek, as being neither "great" nor "self-collected." It is a dispersion, not a concentration of intensity.

Now Lessing rightly says that this very want of concentration, this dispersion, this *extension of time and place* so fatal to sculpture, is just that which forms the chief characteristic of poetry. Thereby is extended vastly the province of poetry; thereby it is endowed with a power incomparably superior to that of sculpture and painting.

It is true that in these latter arts also we sometimes find a slight extension of time suggested. For instance, Raphael will so paint a drapery that it is evident that it has just fallen from its former position into its present folds. As we gaze at the statue of the dying gladiator (or Gaul) it does appear as if—

" His drooped head sinks gradually low,
And through his side the last drops, ebbing slow,
From the red gash, fall heavy, one by one."

But extend this motion, this dispersion of restraint a little more. Consider the pictures and sculptures that one sees of acts in *accomplishment*: a wave actually breaking, not poised ere it break; a blow arrested, congealed into immobility, midway in its downward career. Does not the thing annoy one more every time one looks at it?

Now let us turn to what, on the contrary, poetry can effect by "extending the moment."

I have said that Homer draws no detailed picture of Helen. Yet to us she is one of the fairest in our "dreams of fair women." How has he produced this result? He has shown no picture of her beauty, but the *effect* of that beauty extended over a long line. Did it not cause the war of Troy? Is not the whole story of Ilium's fall due to that one cause—the beauty of Helen? Even the grey-haired elders of Priam's assembly when they see her approach, bowed down as they are with the troubles that she has brought upon them, cannot restrain their admiration. "Small blame," they say, "that Trojans and Achæans should have suffered evils so long for the sake of such a woman. She is wholly like in features to the immortal goddesses."

So much for the true poetical method of describing a woman's beauty—by extending the moment: by telling us what she said and thought; how she moved; what feelings her beauty aroused in others. But the matter does not end here.

A poet is capable of an act utterly beyond the power of the painter or sculptor. The scenes that he introduces in order to form his "entirety" may have no connection whatever in *time or space* with the dominant scene that he depicts. They have an *ideal* connection—such as we have seen may exist between the notes of music and moonlight, between a red colour and the blast of a trumpet; and as long as that ideal connection is unbroken it matters not

how diverse in other respects such introduced images may be.

Let us take an example. Milton is describing the conflict of the celestial and infernal legions. Gabriel's army is gradually, with a flashing of moving squadrons, hemming in Satan. In the midst of this terrific scene, see what a picture he suddenly introduces :—

“ While thus he spake, th' angelic squadron bright
Turned fiery red, sharpening in moonèd horns
Their phalanx, and began to hem him round
With ported spears—as thick as when a field
Of Ceres ripe for harvest, waving bends
Her bearded grove of ears, which way the wind
Sways them.”

A field of corn in the midst of an angelic battle-scene ! What painter would dare such a combination ? But that is not all.

“ The careful ploughman doubting stands,
Lest on the threshing-floor his hopeful sheaves
Prove chaff.”

Our mind pictures the rustic in his fustian, with his honest stupid face, calculating how many hundred-weight per acre the land will produce. Then, without a pause,—

“ On the other, Satan alarmed,
Collecting all his might, dilated stood,
Like Teneriffe, or Atlas unremoved.”

Here is a strange medley ! Fancy a painter, after he had depicted this scene of the angelic hosts and

Satan, inserting in some corner of his picture a little rustic landscape—a cornfield and a ploughman! And yet why do we not resent this in poetry? Because for the poet time and space are annihilated. His associations are not merely between objects conditioned by time and space, but between these things and the ideas that they represent under what Spinoza calls the “attributes of extension and thought.”

One more instance I must give you—this time from Dante.

These little pictures, inlaid like mosaics, Dante uses perhaps more effectively than any poet. They live in one’s memory; though often, in returning to the actual words, one is disappointed at their concentrated brevity.

He is describing the horrible ice-field in the lowest pit of the *Inferno*, in which condemned souls are fixed and frozen, with only their heads protruding above the ice. He likens these to frogs, which in summer poke their noses out of the water in order to croak better; and the idea of *summer* is given by another introduced scene:—

“E come a gracidar sista la rana
Col muso fuor dell’ acqua—quando sogna
Di spigolar sovente la villana.”

“And as to croak the frog doth place himself
With muzzle out of water—*when the peasant girl
Dreams oft of gleanings.*

There is the picture—a gem in seven words.

Homer constantly uses such introduced scenes. A warrior fights ferociously. He is likened to a lion and then follows a description of a lion-hunt in the midst of the clamour and tumult of a battle. The warriors collect for battle, or for an assembly ; forthwith is introduced a picture of gathering flocks of cranes, or geese, or swarms of bees.

Indeed, when we come to look closely into almost any passage of true poetry, we shall find how this capacity for "movement" is taken advantage of by the poets. What some critics—especially French critics—have called the barbarous luxuriance of Shakespeare in crowding image upon image, simile upon simile, is merely the most highly developed result of the exercise of the poet's legitimate powers.

There is still another point. The same "motion" that is necessary to true poetry, while it prevents the poet from painting beauty in its vivid material colour and motionless statuesque shapes, likewise prevents his pictures of unloveliness, of ugliness and horror from assuming a too repulsive form. Venus enraged would be repulsive in painting or sculpture. In poetry her anger merely serves as a contrast. She is soon lovelier than ever, smiling through her tears. In pictorial art such scenes are repellent, and are inadmissible. Such are many of the hideous pictures that may be found in our galleries, more especially those belonging to the French school. Such are many illustrations of books, as—to take the mos

flagrant example—Doré's illustrations of the "Inferno."

But for the poet nothing is common or unclean. The strength, the supremacy, of poetry lies in her *extension*. There is no continent of knowledge, no ocean, sea, or streamlet of emotion, over which her empire does not extend. Hers is indeed an empire on which the sun never sets, a boundless realm, such as she claims in Schiller's well-known lines, which may be thus roughly translated :—

"No confines limit me, no fetters bind :
I freely soar wherever space can reach.
My empire is the endless realm of mind,
My wingèd minister is human speech.
All things that deep in Nature's secret lie
Must be unveilèd and unsealed for me ;
All life is mine that moves in earth or sky,
For boundless is the power of poesy."

This liberty of the poet (which, as all true liberty, is not mere unbridled license but has laws of its own) to some might seem destructive of that *unity* of outward form, which is requisite in a work of art. This introduces us to not only the question of unity of idea in a poem, but also to that of the three *dramatic unities* of time, place, and action, considered necessary by the classical writers. But these subjects I must defer to another occasion.

Let us here consider for a few moments a device which is not unfrequently used both in poetry and in the pictorial arts—I mean Allegory.

What do we mean by allegory and allegorical art?

Every true artistic creation, as well as every reality in life, represents an idea. This idea is generally also representable in other forms,—in an intellectual form for instance. Now, when a work of art does not by its mere existence as an artistic creation represent the idea, but we are by some external trait *artificially* reminded of, not artistically inspired with, such idea, then I should call the method allegorical. By being artificially reminded I mean that some artifice draws our attention from the artist's work (which should itself inspire us with the idea) to some other form, often intellectual, which we are accustomed to use as the medium for the idea in question. Thus, for instance, a character in a poem is not allowed to fulfil its function by its mere artistic existence, but it must have external traits appended to it which shall (so to speak) *label* it as representing what under an intellectual form we conceive of as virtue or vice.

It is this false method to which I would here limit the word allegorical.

The only condition under which such allegory is admissible in art is that these appendages shall be of the simplest character, and such as have by habit become associated with the object described (as, for instance, wings in pictures of angels), so that they seem naturally to belong to it; as Homer's epithets by constant recurrence become almost connected with his substantives.

Of all useless undertakings perhaps the most profitless is that of those who spend their energies in "unweaving rainbows" woven by poetic genius. It is an easy matter to discover an allegory in every reality, whether of life or art ; but to transfer the idea to another form, such as an intellectual, is as difficult as it is for the chemical analyst to re-form a diamond from its component elements. It needs a creative power, which of all men the critic or the commentator, as a rule, possesses least. And even when the artist himself attempts the recreation of his idea in an inartistic form, he naturally fails.

The allegory of the "Fairie Queene" has been most fully, and with anxious exactitude, explained by the poet Spenser. Tasso rewrote, and in rewriting spoilt, his great epic in order more distinctly to *state* its allegorical meaning. In our days Tennyson has allowed (for it was done, I believe, with his approval, if not by his express wish) his "Idylls" to be "explained" in the same way; and we are asked to believe that the real value of these poems lies in their allegorical meaning.

Now why is it that we do not, and rightly do not, believe this? It is because, as has been already said, every true creation of the artist is *in itself* a reality, no less than every reality in life, and because they are so by virtue of the idea which by their mere existence they represent : and we receive their message by accepting them exactly as they are placed before us.

As soon as the artist abandons his special power of creating such realities for us, and has recourse to other methods, we rightly resent it. I think this explains (for me, at least) the invariable feeling of dissatisfaction which allegorical pictures, sculptures, and poems, and a corresponding class of music, produce.

The age of Spenser, which was that also of Tasso, was one in which allegorical art (if one may use such a contradiction in terms) was practised to a ridiculous extent. The fact that such men as Raphael and Shakespeare and others were not more affected by this false taste of emblematics, only proves their greatness ; though Raphael himself sometimes gives way, and Shakespeare allows himself to introduce on to the stage such a figure as that of "Rumour—painted full of tongues."

The following description of a portrait of Harpocrates by Vasari (the biographer of Italian artists and himself a painter), is quoted by Sir Charles Eastlake, "I have made him with very great eyes and ears, wishing it to be inferred that he saw and heard much. . . . He has a crown of cherries and medlars, the earliest and latest fruits, to represent judgment. He is girded with serpents, and places one hand on a goose, to indicate vigilance,"—in reference, I suppose to the vigilant geese which saved the Capitol from the Gauls.

And of another portrait he says, "The round stool on which Alassandro de' Medici sits indicates

that his power is to have no end,"—which we might compare with the lines of Dryden on Cromwell:—

"How shall I then begin, and where conclude
To draw a fame so truly circular?
For in a round what order can be showed,
Where all the parts so equal-perfect are?"

In sculpture, more even than in painting and poetry, allegory is destructive of all true effect. Hence we rightly deem as barbarous and monstrous such sculptures as the hundred-breasted Diana of the Ephesians, the four-armed Apollo of the Lacedæmonians (though not worse than Shakespeare's "Rumour"), and the horns of Jupiter Ammon, and even the sprouting horns of Io which occur in ancient paintings, if not in sculpture. One hardly knows whether or not to include with these M. Angelo's statue of Moses, with its strange horn-like protuberances, due, I believe, to a mistranslation in the Vulgate.*

All such allegorical appendages are wanting in the best sculpture. Bacchus is never (as Lessing tells us) represented in statuary with his horns, though he is thus represented in poetry. To place a pan-pipe in the hand of Mercury, to give him winged sandals, or to arm Hercules with his club,—this is not to furnish them with allegorical appendages, but with what intrinsically belongs to them and helps to represent them in their peculiar character.

* "Cornua" instead of "gloria," the original bearing both meanings.

But when we find, as we do find in an Italian statue, Truth represented as opening with her hands a deep gash in her breast, as if to show her heart to the spectator, we at once recognize the false method, and reject it no less than we reject the same in Shakespeare, who in the "Midsummer Night's Dream" makes Lysander exclaim—

"Transparent Helena ! Nature shows her art,
That through thy bosom makes me see thy heart."

Perhaps allegorical falsity never reached a more comico-tragical climax than when (as Sir Charles Eastlake tells us), in order to represent Death without his terrors, the sculptor of some Papal monument surmounted the whole with a *gilded* skeleton.

There is only one poet known to me who has the power of combining in one form a poetic reality and an allegorical symbol. Dante's poem is, to use the cumbrous expression of a German writer (Schelling), "an entirely unique mean between allegory and symbolic objective form." His creations are in themselves intensely real, and yet, at the same time, this very reality seems to depend on the fact that they are allegorical. Thus (as I hope to show more distinctly later) his Furies are not, as are Æschylus' Furies, realistic objects from which our senses instinctively recoil, terrible in their mere presence even amidst a natural scene, but terrible *only* because we have followed the poet down to hell, the home of the Furies ; and having once passed that Gate of Despair,

having once accepted the fearful truth of the allegory, we feel (although conscious that it is but an allegory) the reality of the infernal scenes, and share the poet's terror at the ghastly apparition. Or consider Beatrice herself. What would she be but the little daughter of Portinari, had she not been chosen by the poet to represent Christian Theology? And yet how cold and lifeless an image would that same symbolized Theology be, were she not at the same time the real human Beatrice, whose sweet eyes, as they gave him salutation in the streets of Florence, fired the heart of Dante, and inspired him to sing of heaven and hell.

But such a creation as Beatrice is, I think, unique in art. And, as I am speaking of Dante, I cannot but mention another poetic method of this supreme master which is, I think, used with success by no other poet, and which is to some extent of the same character as what has just been described. I mean the method of seizing and simply naming or describing a feeling—the *exact feeling* which underlies what he wishes us to conceive, "Many of his comparisons," says Macaulay, "are intended to give an exact idea of feelings under particular circumstances."

Now this is a very common mode of expression in everyday conversation; and in a poet's description it seems both easy and ineffectual to say, *e.g.*, that a man looked "very angry" or "very happy," and so on. It needs poetic power, and that of the highest kind, to so *exactly* seize the one underlying

feeling that the whole character or scene which the poet wishes us to conceive shall be brought vividly before us by that one touch. The greatest ever lies nearest to the easiest, the sublime to the ridiculous ; and when this common method, which we use perhaps a hundred times a day in our conversation, is used supremely well, it is one of the most wonderful acts of the poetic imagination ; for the poet has seized, and set before us in a word, the inmost idea of the thing, round which the artistic form at once clusters itself, instead of building up, however grandly or vividly, the form in order to represent the idea.

The following examples will perhaps make these ill-expressed thoughts more intelligible ; although, without a knowledge of the context, the wonderful effect of the words may be scarcely perceptible.

Of the angel who comes to quell the crew of furious fiends on the ramparts of the Fiery City, and to open the city gate,—a glorious shape, advancing in dignity across the marsh and waving aside the gross darkness with his left hand,—the following words seem to me to give a conception far grander and more vivid than could volumes of description :—

“ And he spake no word to us ; but looked like one
Whom other care urges and incites than that of him
who is before him.”

Again, in order to give us a picture of the Virgin at the moment of the Annunciation, he says—

“And in her face she had this expression stamped
‘Behold the handmaid of the Lord,’ as distinctly
As any figure stamps itself in wax.”

And of the announcing angel he says—

“Beatitude seemed written on his face.”

If you will read the cantos in which these passages occur, you will, if I am not mistaken, perceive in what an extraordinary manner these apparently commonplace expressions descriptive of a feeling are master-strokes of genius revealing the idea.

I shall now pass on in order to briefly consider two matters connected with the *form of words* used by the poet; these are the questions of metrical expression and rhyme.

Coleridge says, with great plausibility, that the true antithesis lies *not* between poetry and prose, but between poetry and science. This holds true in many cases. Poetry and metrical language are by no means convertible terms: so that though there is of course a distinction in the form of words between verse and prose, there is very often true poetry in an unmetrical and true prose in a metrical form, and the antithesis does not lie between the metrical and the unmetrical.

We must, however, go deeper than the mere outward form.

The *thought* of the poet, the way in which he grasps and models his subject before he attempts

to transfer it to the final material language, is essentially different from that of the prose writer in this, that he sees and is to teach ideal truth by the forms that he bodies forth; that he is to teach us to recognize in his creations, and to strive after, that supernal loveliness which is imaged also in the material world.

I have already pointed out the intimate indissoluble connection that exists in all true literature between the thought of the writer and his language and have shown that the language must be the natural outcome of his thought—that it should be as personal, as peculiar, as his very shadow. And of no writer is this so true as the poet. If a metrical musical form is chosen by the poet, it is because the thought compels it, being itself of the same nature. “A musical thought,” says Carlyle, “is one spoken by a mind that has penetrated into the inmost heart of the thing: detected the inmost mystery of it, namely the melody that lies hidden in it: the inward harmony of coherence which is its soul, whereby it exists and has a right to be here in the world.”

Music *is* truly at the heart and beginning of all things. It was not a vain myth* that made Eros,

* That of the cosmogonic Eros, to be found in Hesiod's Theogony, Plato's Symposium, and elsewhere. Cf.—

“Quando l'Amor divino
Mosse da prima quelle cose belle.” (*Inf.* i. 39).

Tasso also alludes to this in his verses beginning—

“Amore alma è del mondo.”

the God of love and beauty, the deity who reduced the shapeless mass of chaos to an harmonious whole. Indeed, the very word "harmony," used both of music and of the fit coherence of the parts that form a whole, shows that we recognize the musical rhythmical character of true existence; and the truer that existence the more musical it is.

Can we wonder, then, that the poet, dealing as he does with ideal truth, should instinctively, necessarily, choose a musical rhythmical expression?

Do we not observe this often when any deep emotion of sorrow, joy, or anger forces a man to give utterance to his inmost truest feelings? Passionate language is musical.

And of all men the poet is exquisitely sensitive to such harmonies. He unconsciously chooses, not only a musical form, but that musical form which shall best harmonize with, best express, his thought.

Hence the varieties of metre. Among the ancients we have the stately tragic iambic, the long roll of the epic hexameter, the rippling tetrameters announcing the advent of a fresh character on the stage, the short heart-stirring lyric measures; then Dante's compact *terza rima* fitted together like mosaics; Tasso's and Spenser's stanzas; Milton's majestic blank verse; Tennyson's dirgelike "In Memoriam" metre; and countless other rhythmic variations.

Every language has its peculiar metres—metres peculiarly fitted to its genius. Therefore it is but

natural that in translations we should choose not always the original metre, but one that holds a similar place in our own language. The attempts to use the metres of other languages are generally ludicrous failures, though we have a moderate success in Goethe's "Hermann und Dorothea," and in Longfellow's "Evangeline," and perhaps in some of Tennyson's attempts—"barbarous experiments" though he calls them. Here is, for instance, an imitation of the lyric-measure of Alcæus—

" Me rather all that bowery loveliness,
The brooks of Eden mazily murmuring,
And bloom profuse and cedar arches,
Charm as a wanderer out in the ocean,
Where some refulgent sunset of India
Streams o'er a rich ambrosial ocean isle,
And crimson-hued the stately palm-woods
Whisper in odorous heights of even."

The question of Rhyme has given rise to much dispute. Milton speaks very severely against it as being "no necessary adjunct or true ornament of poem or good verse, but the invention of a barbarous age to set off wretched matter and lame metre." We may, I think (in spite of Milton's dictum), consider it to be essentially musical in its nature. It is, as it were, a new stop in our organ of poetical expression, which a man may legitimately employ if it helps to express his thought: and it seems of special use in lyrics, where the thought is especially musical.

Rhyme seems to be a natural mode of musical

expression in many nations. It abounds in Arabic poetry, and its present prevalence with us may perhaps be traced partly from the Arabic school, through the Sicilian, Provençal, and Italian poets, and partly from the old Latin hymns.

Arthur Hallam, the Arthur of "In Memoriam," tells us that "Rhyme has been said to contain in itself a constant appeal to the memory and to hope." It is an expression worth remembering. We look forward with hope to the coming rhyme, we connect it with the past rhyme by memory.

CHAPTER III.

SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF ANCIENT AND MODERN ART.

BEFORE beginning the subject of this chapter, I should like to add a few words in illustration of what has already been said on the essential difference between poetry and the loosely termed pictorial arts—painting and sculpture,—and to touch on the question of the Tone-art.

I said that in mere description, in imitating a form at one fixed point in its period of existence—to use Wordsworth's expression, at "one brief moment caught from fleeting time"—that in this, poetry abandons her own special powers, and invades the realm of the pictorial arts. In order to prove that this imitation is a false object for poetry, we cannot possibly have a more conclusive testimony than the fact that in such cases poetry, feeling her own incapability, summons to her aid her sister art. Lessing gives us one or two examples of this—to which I will add a few that I have stumbled across

First, I will freely translate an ode of the Greek poet Anacreon, in which he gives a description of his lady's beauty—an ode which Ariosto seems to me to have copied rather closely, indeed almost translated, in his description of Alcina. Both Anacreon and Ariosto begin by appealing to a painter for help. "Her shape is of such perfect symmetry as best to feign th' industrious painter knows"—thus begins Ariosto. And Anacreon in the same manner: "Best of painters," he says, "paint me my absent lady, as I shall bid thee. First paint her hair, soft and black; and, if thy image can effect it, paint me it scented with myrrh. And paint beneath the dark locks her ivory brow; and from between her eyebrows let the nose descend in a gently sloping line, unbroken yet not straight; and let thy picture have, as she too has, dark arched eyebrows that meet and mingle imperceptibly . . . and paint her nostril and her cheek by mixing roses with the milk." But all is in vain—all this most vivid and luscious word-colouring is futile; and, suddenly breaking loose from the painter and his colours and forms, poetry, "like a cloud of fire," soars up once more into her native element, that of imagination,—*"Around her alabaster neck,"* the poet exclaims, utterly regardless of the poor painter, "let all the graces flit." "Stop! stop!" he cries at last, as if dismissing the artist from his useless task—"stop! for I *see* her—her very self! O image, thou wilt speak to me directly!" The poet has by imagination

summoned up, not a mere coloured picture of her, but her very self, his own sweet mistress, the living, speaking, loving reality itself. It is the story of Pygmalion's image realized.

In another ode Anacreon endeavours to describe his favourite Bathyllus in the same way, by the aid of a painter, who is to copy the most beautiful limbs from pictures and sculptures of various gods—till all these various things of beauty should “stand star-like around” and gather into one godlike form. As another example, take Dante's exclamation when he wishes to describe a quiescent object—a man in the most quiescent state possible, except that of death itself, namely, in a deep sleep: “Had I the power to pourtray how Argus was charmed to sleep by the pipe of Mercury, as a painter who paints with a model would I design how I was lulled asleep.”

Once more,—a passage from Byron :—

“ Her head hung down, and her long hair in stooping
 Concealed her features better than a veil :
 And one hand o'er the ottoman lay drooping,
 White, waxen, and as alabaster pale.
 Would that I were a painter ! to be grouping,
 All that a poet drags into detail !
 Oh that my words were colours ! but their tints
 May serve perhaps as outlines or slight hints.”

The very epithets best chosen by a poet to describe the distinct form and vivid colouring of a thing in a state of immobility—and such a description may legi-

timately be used as poetic material—such epithets are drawn from the sister art. I need only quote one passage to prove this :—

“ Day after day, day after day,
We stuck—nor breath, nor motion :
As idle as a *painted* ship
Upon a *painted* ocean.”

On the other hand, when poetry, trusting in her own powers alone, undertakes to describe works of pictorial art, she instinctively transmutes them into her peculiar forms ; endows them with life and motion : as we have already seen in the case of Anacreon. Leaving the mere material shape, she introduces, in order to create her poetic entirety, thoughts and scenes beyond even the suggestion of a picture or a statue. For instance, the statue of the dying gladiator or Gaul, *as a statue*, contains everything in its mere marble form as it lies before us ; but see how the poet breaks the fetters of time and space to body forth the idea in a poetic form :—

“ The arena swims around him—he is gone
Ere ceased the inhuman shout which hailed the wretch who won.

He heard it, but he heeded not—his eyes
Were with his heart, and that was far away :
He recked not of the life he lost, nor prize,
But where his rude hut by the Danube lay,
There were his young barbarians all at play,
There was their Dacian mother—he, their sire,
Butchered to make a Roman holiday,—
All this rushed with his blood. Shall he expire
And unavenged ! Arise, ye Goths, and glut your ire ! ”

I need scarcely mention as a conspicuous example of this the celebrated description of Achilles' shield given us by Homer. Everything is in motion and life : the wedding festival, with its dances and its noise of pipes and viols ; the law court, where the prisoner addresses the people, vowing that he has paid the price of blood, while his adversary declares that he has received nothing ; the besieged city ; the ambush and cattle-lifting scene ; the men ploughing with oxen, "to whom, whensoever they arrived at the end of the field, a man would come bringing a cup of sweet wine, and then they turned back again down the furrows, desirous to reach the other end of the rich fallow land, while the upturned soil grew dark behind them, appearing like ploughed land though made of gold. Which was verily a wonder to behold." All these scenes, as well as those of reaping, grape-gathering, lion-hunting, and dancing, are described in the imperfect tense, as continued, not momentary, actions ; an "extension of time and space" is introduced in nearly all : thus, of the dancers, "sometimes they were dancing with skilful feet in a circle, moving swiftly and lightly round, like a potter's wheel ; at other times drawn up in opposite lines."

Hesiod, or whoever was the author of the "Shield of Hercules" (the description of which is but little inferior to that of Achilles' shield in Homer), has ventured an imaginative stroke which shows us, I think, very distinctly, the true boundary line of the

pictorial arts in one direction; for the conception is one utterly beyond painting or sculpture, and one which neither of these arts should attempt by any illusion to compass. He speaks of one of the figures on the shield, *i.e.* Perseus, as actually *hovering* over its surface, unattached to the shield, "neither touching it with his feet nor yet far from it: a great wonder to tell of; since it was nowhere attached . . . but flitted over it like a thought," *i.e.* not as a substantial fixed shape. With perhaps a still bolder flight of imagination, in order to give an idea of the terrible pursuit of the Gorgons, following Perseus, he says, "As they trod on the yellow bronze the shield rang with a great crashing."

I can but mention, in passing, besides the Laocoon which Virgil, as we have seen, has rightly described uttering terrible shrieks, the same poet's description of the sculptured scenes from the Trojan war, which Æneas finds on the *façades* and friezes of the Carthaginian temple. But Virgil is not always so instinctively a true poet as Homer. I must, for want of time, omit also the wonderful and most truly poetical description given by Dante of the marble sculptures, or reliefs, cut in the side of the Purgatorial mountain. It must suffice to say that, having inspired them all with life and motion, so that they seemed actually to the senses to move and speak, having, in fact, made them by the force of his imagination what no mere sculpture could be, or should attempt to be, he allows that they were made by God Himself (as Homer and

Hesiod attribute their shields to a Divine artist), and that no such sculpture could be found on earth.

The term that he applies to these divine sculptures, *i.e.* "visibile parlare," or visible language, being one (as ever with Dante) of most exact and true application to the case in point, but utterly inapplicable to the productions of ordinary sculpture or painting, would serve as an excellent text for a further disquisition on the limits and powers of these arts,—from which I will abstain. I shall merely remark that I believe their end, especially that of sculpture, not to be any such illusion as making language or motion visible. They must not use their unrivalled powers of depicting a momentary state in order to deceive us by an idol of form, nor endeavour to arrest and congeal motion—giving us grimace instead of beauty, and perpetuating what is only true as a part of some unity, whether in nature or human character. They must not *tear* a leaf out of nature's book, utterly unintelligible and meaningless without its context; but rather (to repeat the fine expression of Wordsworth in his sonnet to a picture) they should give—

"To one brief moment, caught from fleeting time,
The appropriate *calm* of blest eternity."

And having now endeavoured to point out some of the characteristic differences of the poetic and pictorial arts, I should like to draw attention for a few moments to the distinctive character of another especially modern art—that of Tones. A full discussion

of this interesting question lies outside the range of my present subjects, so I must simply suggest one or two points from which the subject may be viewed.

In the first place, while the combinations produced by the poet, sculptor, and painter are such as are found in nature, or are at least of such a character that they can be classed with natural objects, the productions of the tone-art are invariably (except in the case of imitative music) combinations never found in nature, and of a character quite distinct from that of any natural phenomenon. Now, does this, or does it not, involve an impossibility of any vital connection between musical productions and human life?

Secondly, does music seem to appeal exclusively to the emotions—to be solely pathetic?

Considered irrespectively of tones, the musical element, as for instance in thought or language, denotes the presence of emotion. This we see to be true in poetry, where feeling and music rise and fall together; and it is especially so in lyrics. In the case of ordinary speech, too, "passionate language is always musical." That music again, which, as Carlyle has said, lies at the inmost core of all things, is it not the harmony created by our passionate recognition of truth? For without sympathetic passion no deep truth can be fully recognized.

Then, if we consider the uses to which the art of tones naturally lends itself, and the primary effects that it produces on us, I think we shall find that they

are exclusively emotional. The emotions excited may have a grand tendency ; we may seem to be lifted to some sublime peak from which is unrolled before us an almost infinite scene ; we may feel for the time an almost boundless passion for the true, and a fathomless contempt for the false and trivial : but is this merely a temporary excitement of the feelings ? Is there any "sticking-place," any solid foothold, so that a real advance, a practical result, is attainable ? In fine, is the tone-art (as Plato asks of poetry) of use "in its bearings on human life" ?

When we appeal from our own judgment to that of those whose instinct in such questions is probably of far greater value than any analytic acumen—I mean such men as Shakespeare and Dante,—we find that music is spoken of as a "sweet power," the "food of love ;" that it "*moves* by concord of sweet sounds ;" that nothing is so "stockish, hard, and full of rage, but music for the time" (observe, only for the time) "doth change its nature ;" that if a man be not moved by music, "the motions of his spirit are dull as night, and his *affections* dark as Erebus." To the same purpose are Dante's beautiful words when he speaks of Casella's music as that "which used to quiet me in all my longings."

Dryden, also, in his fine Ode, dwells exclusively on the *passions* that music can "raise or quell." And, lastly, Pythagoras, the grandeur of whose poetic imagination allows us to class him with such men as

Dante and Shakespeare, held music—that is, the art of tones—to be the connecting medium between abstract truth and human feeling.

The questions that arise from these considerations are these: whether this tone-art can stand as an art on its own merits, or whether it is merely a pathetic influence subservient to the creative art of poetry; whether Milton is right when he says:—

“ . . . harmonious sisters, Verse and Voice,
Wed your divine sounds and mixed power employ ;”

and whether it was not a right instinct which made Beethoven wed the divine sounds of his last symphony to the verse of Schiller's “Freude;” and lastly, whether after all we must not accept the modern “Programme Music,” which we are so apt to resent, as well as the conclusion of Wagner—that in the opera, and not in the symphony, the tone-art finds its most perfect development.

On the other hand, while we allow that the creations of the tone artist affect us exclusively through our emotions, are we right in limiting its effect to an excitement of the feelings? Is it not possible that, as is the case with other arts, our feelings are merely the medium through which the idea of beauty is communicated to us? In short, does not music reveal as well as excite? Is it not conceivable that some revelation is effected for us which strengthens our belief in the eternal harmony of all things, and adds to our powers of discerning

that harmony amid the seeming discords of actual life? If this be so, then music is no mere handmaid of poetry; it *can* stand as a revealing art on its own merits. It finds its highest development when it trusts to its own special powers; and the maxim that it needs a basis of thought, a programme, is as false as the maxim "*ut pictura poesis*."

After these rather diffuse prefatory remarks, I must now turn to the subject of this chapter.

Among a number of photographs of scenes in many parts of the world—African lakes and swamps and savages mixed up with pictures of Venice, Ravenna, and Greek sculptures,—there is, in my collection, one which many might pass by with a hasty glance or disparaging remark. And yet the thrill of exquisite delight which that poor faded monochrome photograph excites, as it reminds one of a certain summer afternoon, when the cloudless Italian sky hung overhead, and against the dark blue Mediterranean stood out in all their perfect symmetry and grandeur the rich brown fluted columns of Poseidon's temple—"perfect as when they left the Doric master's hand,"—such a feeling, I say, is one that no words can express.

Sometimes, however, he or she who is turning over these photographs, seeing this of Pæstum, will suddenly look up with eyes full of a new light—"I have been there too!" No more is needed. So great a difference does an acquaintance with the

original make, both in scenery and literature, that when I realize that I have undertaken to speak of ancient literature (and ancient means Greek literature), I begin to despair; for among those whom I address there are, doubtless, not a few who have not had the opportunity of studying this ancient literature.* However, I must do what I can, and trust that those of you who may have never known what it is to wander in imagination with Plato on the banks of the Ilissus, and to hear the nightingales of Colonus with Sophocles, nor have been on the plains of the Scamander with Homer, nor witnessed the tragedy of Argos with Æschylus, may bear patiently with me, if I fail but to produce aught but a blurred colourless picture, containing no recognizable trace of the beauty of the original scene. I shall not indeed attempt, nor could I hope, to instil into minds that do not already possess it a love and admiration for Greek literature. My purpose is rather to attempt a distinction between the ancient and modern *spirit*: the cause that underlies the great differences existing in the two literatures—differences that are the natural outcome of the different spirit of the two ages, and without which natural characteristics a literature may be fairly called not *native* to the age and country, but *exotic*—an introduced, hot-house growth.

There are three thoughts that I wish to suggest,

* The audiences to which this was originally addressed consisted to a great extent of ladies.

not as strict definitions, but as illustrations of the tendencies of the two literatures.

First, Greek literature is like—is a product of the same spirit as—Greek architecture. Modern literature is like Gothic. As that temple of Poseidon at Pæstum is to Westminster Abbey, so is a play of Sophocles to a play of Shakespeare.

Secondly, Greek poetic literature is plastic, sculpturesque. The Modern is rather picturesque. We have seen that the great characteristic of sculpture is concentration of intensity into a single form and moment. Painting has less concentration, both of time and place. It has expression, varied movement, and perspective—not such as poetry possesses, yet more than sculpture. Taking these peculiarities of the two arts, we can say that ancient poetry is more like sculpture, modern more like painting.

Thirdly, a good deal of that sudden light which a single word or definition can throw on a subject (though definitions are dangerous articles) has been thrown on my ideas by the words of Schlegel. “The spirit of antique poetry,” he says, “is ideal: that of romantic poetry is mystical.” “Ideal” in this sense, means that an object of the material world is presented to us in its highest perfection (often, indeed, more perfect than we can find it in nature), so that, by fixing our eyes on this image, we receive, often unconsciously, through the senses, a direct reflection, or echo, as it were, of infinite perfection.

The more sensitive to beauty we are, the more do such things appeal to us, and often there is a danger of adoring the idol (the εἰδωλον) instead of the supernal beauty that it represents. But before we condemn others for their sensuous worship, their *idolatry*, let us be quite sure that our nature, especially in this "cold climate" that Milton laments as destructive of artistic feeling, is not so much less poetic than theirs that it cannot receive the truth in this manner; and let us be quite sure that we do not set up, instead of these sensuous forms of beauty, idols far more unlovely.

The romantic—that is, the modern—spirit is *mystical*. In using the word with reference to poetry I would give it this meaning—that it does not labour to set before us those *nearly* perfect material forms, but treats rather of the relation that we and all things have to the infinite; and it therefore disregards the perfection of form, using natural material things merely as its illustrations, turning from natural imperfection to point upwards to the infinite.

As regards *form*, then,—and the perfectness of art depends on form,—we naturally find that the ancients are greatly our superiors. As regards the revelation of the infinite to such minds and natures as those of our age and climate, doubtless the poetry of modern times is far more satisfactory.

Let us now turn to the cause of this ancient spirit.

Its characteristic is a wonderful creative energy productive of sculpturesque form.

This is recognizable in (i.) their grand self-reliance, (ii.) in the *plastic* nature of their imagination—two traits which I shall examine together.

In the natural temperament of the Greeks two traits are especially conspicuous—an exquisite sensitiveness to form, and an intense love for liberty. Now, this liberty was attained by them through, and was fostered by, their self-reliance, their capacity for self-government. They stood in their own strength, in their self-completeness.

External conditions favoured the development of this temperament. Endowed with great bodily beauty and vigour, living under a genial sky in a land of extraordinary loveliness, unconquered even by the mighty hosts of Media, the Hellenic race in the age of Sophocles and Pheidias could give full scope to a free and imaginative spirit. Notice too that they had no *past* such as we have. "We are always talking," says Hazlitt, "of the Greeks and Romans. They never said anything about us."

This great self-reliant spirit in combination with the love for defined form we find illustrated in their polity, their religion, and their philosophy.

First, in the world of politics, consider the perfect form that each little Greek state built up for itself. Each citizen had his appointed place. The individual was nothing in himself, but merely a member of the

state. All interest was centred in that "mother city" (though in times of common danger it was extended to embrace Hellas); the outside world was but a barbarian host, or, at the best, *ξένοι*—allies of the state. This concentration, this sacrifice of personal interests to the perfecting of the state, is seen at its highest perhaps at Sparta. Children were adopted as future citizens, or exposed to death on Mount Taygetus, at the option of the state. Marriages were arranged and controlled, the duties of the citizen were prescribed, by the state alone.

Turn from this to religion.

Consider the Homeric gods. Think of Zeus, Apollo, Artemis, Aphrodite, Athene, and Ares. These personifications the Greek mind bodied forth as distinct material forms, anthropomorphisms, idealized human beings, who did not disdain to share the quarrels, to enter the battles, and to enjoy the loves of mortals, and who in neither moral nor physical beauty were beyond the rivalry of the self-reliant, godlike, heroic race of men.

In the earliest kind of philosophy too—speculations on physical science—the Greeks did not treat of "first causes," "laws of nature," "vortex rings," and the like, but spoke boldly of the primary *element*, the first material, fire or water—self-confident deduction being combined with the acceptance of a material form.

In all the ethical philosophers we see a calm dignity

and a grand simplicity of thought and language which remind us of some Pheidian sculpture or Doric temple, while in Stoicism we find the very same motive as is essential in statuary—a great self-reliant restraint, a self-sufficiency which could lift a man even above the gods.

Again, when they looked at nature not in a scientific but a poetic spirit, would they be satisfied with the “spirit and wisdom of the universe” of which Wordsworth speaks? Or with Shelley’s ethereal beings—the “wild spirit” of the west wind, the “spirit of beauty,” the “blithe spirit” floating

“In the golden lightning
Of the sunken sun . . .

Like an unbodied joy, whose race is just begun”?

No : they peopled the woods with Satyrs and Dryads, the rivers and seas with Nymphs and Tritons—real substantial shapes. As the hunter wandered through the slopes of Parnassus or in the vale of Tempe, he might hear the ringing laughter of the Oreads—might in some glade surprise Artemis at her bath, or meet her in full pursuit of the chase, or on moonlight nights find her wandering in search of her beloved Endymion.

All Greek poetry is inspired with this spirit. It is intensely *sculpturesque*. Idealized, material forms are presented to us. It is so with Homer. Like a raised sculpture, each of his heroes and heroines stands out

in relief against the background of the story,—Hector, Achilles, Helen, Priam. But it is not in epic, it is in the Greek *drama* especially that this has its highest development. All drama—all *acted* drama at all events—needs a distinct representation, and thus is naturally inclined to be statuesque. In Greek drama especially this is conspicuous.

“The Homeric epic,” says Schlegel, “is, in poetry, what bas-relief is in sculpture. Tragedy is the distinct isolated group.” In epic “the figures are but slightly raised . . . they are not grouped together but follow each other in succession.” The bas-relief and the epic are both without definite beginning or end. In the bas-relief we have a part of a procession, or a line of dancers, or combatants. In the epic such a scene, capable of extension in either direction, is presented. The present scene in an epic—the one immediately before us—rivets our attention, so that we need not see the whole as one. The bas-relief in like manner may run round a vase, so that it cannot all be seen at once. But it is not so with the drama. It must be perfect in itself—it must have *unity*; and in Greek drama this unity was produced as it is in sculpture.

Before, however, I speak of a Greek drama as a group in itself, and consider its unit, and the laws of the three Unities, I wish to give one or two instances of the sculptural character of the various single forms composing such a group.

Let us take the Prometheus of Æschylus. I shall have occasion later to contrast this Prometheus with his modern representation by Shelley.

Prometheus stole fire from heaven, taught men various arts and sciences, and defied Zeus. He is, in his character of a rebel against a supreme power, like Milton's Satan ; in other respects, especially in his self-devotion and heroic sacrifice for mortals, he more resembles him whom Shelley calls "a Promethean conqueror." Æschylus represents him bound to a naked rock on the shore of the earth-encircling ocean, doomed to an eternity of solitude and anguish, while vultures claw and mangle him.

It is indeed the picture of "a great self-collected soul," such as we have seen to be characteristic of sculpture. In the midst of his agony of mind and body, his unconquered defiance shows no sign of breaking. It is not like the defiant rage of Capaneus in the Inferno, to whom Dante justly says, "O Capaneus, in that thy pride is not extinguished thou art the more punished ; no other torment but thine own rage could complete thine anguish." No : Prometheus is unmoved in soul and body. He is *chained down* to the rock. He is as fixed and motionless as a statue. The whole play keeps him so before our eyes, while he is visited by Ocean and his daughters, the ocean nymphs, by Io, and lastly by Hermes, the messenger from Zeus, who bids him repent and submit. But there is no submission—no bending of

his stubborn, "great self-collected" soul. And the play is concluded by his exclamations of grand defiance, amid the mutterings of the coming tempest, while lightning flashes across the heavens, and the rock itself trembles with earthquake:—

"Ay, now in truth and not in fancy the earth is shaken; and the hollow reverberation of thunder comes billowing past; and fiery curling streaks of lightning flash forth, and whirlwinds eddy the dust: . . . O mother Earth whom I adore, O thou heaven that spherest round the light of all mankind, thou seest the injustice of my sufferings."

Could anything be more like what we should admire in a statue—what, for instance, we *do* admire in the Laocoon?

It would be easy to show the heroic self-collected character of Antigone—how, repelling the cowardice of her sister Ismene, she dares to bury her brother, and when condemned to death, goes to that death with silent grandeur and dignity, betraying by no look, no word, her love for the tyrant's son—bemoaning her untimely death in a few passionate words, such as nature *forces* from her, as it forces from Laocoon a *groan*.

Let us take another instance—this time not of beauty or grandeur, but terror—from the "Eumenides" of Æschylus.

The priestess of Apollo comes forth from the shrine of the god, terror-stricken at the sight that has

met her there—the Furies, who were in chase of the murderer Orestes, sleeping in a ghastly company near their victim :—

“A sight too dreadful to tell, terrible for the eyes to see, has hastened me back again from the temple of the god—so that I have no strength to stand upright, but have hurried away, not with fleetness of my feet, clinging for support by my hands. As I was going towards the inner shrine, I beheld in the central sanctuary a man occupying the suppliant’s seat. From his hands blood was dripping, and he held a new-drawn sword, and was crowned with young shoots of olive and wool—the suppliant’s wreath. . . . And before this man a ghastly company of women is sleeping, reclined on seats. Nay, they are not women; they are Gorgons. Nor can I compare them wholly with Gorgon shapes, or Harpies such as I have seen in pictures carrying off the feast of Phineus. At least *these* are wingless, black all over, loathsome and terrible. And they are snoring with no feigned snortings; and from their eyes they distil a fetid juice; and their form is such as no temple of the gods might harbour, nor house of man.”

Now, I do not mean to say that in modern poets we shall not find equally terrific pictures. But notice that these Furies were terrible *in themselves*, not used merely as personifications of a terrible power. They to the Greek mind—just as Zeus himself, the Dryads,

and the Ocean nymphs—had a real place in the nature of things. The Greek mind was more artistically imaginative than ours, and without the help of the poet bodied forth these incorporations. Among the moderns we therefore find that the poet, when he does use such figures, uses them *mystically* (to repeat Schlegel's expression), and not as Æschylus does when he brings Gods and Furies face to face with men on the stage.

Perhaps I may make this plainer by saying that the tendency of the Greek poet is to draw our minds from the supernatural to the finite forms of the Gods and Furies—*downwards*, towards man and the natural. He incarnates the idea in the material: he shows the gods in material shape, and connects them with earth. He tells merely of the relation that *the supernatural has to men*. The modern poet does the reverse. He shows the relation that *man has to the supernatural*. He draws our mind upwards from these finite pictures to the supernatural infinite. And in treating of this—the human mind's relation to the infinite—he must of necessity have a far more varied, unstable, extended subject: he treats of all the varying beliefs, passions, and aspirations of mankind. It is evident, then, that these pictures in the modern poet will cease to be so necessarily defined. A few imaginative touches will complete a picture sufficient to lift our thoughts at once towards the infinite—one which to a Greek mind, with its downward

tendency, would be unintelligible. Take this from Milton :—

“The other shape,
If shape it might be called that shape had none
Distinguishable in member, joint, or limb,
Or substance might be called that shadow seemed,
For each seemed either ; black it stood as night,
Fierce as ten Furies, terrible as Hell,
And shook a dreadful dart ; what seemed its head
The likeness of a kingly crown had on ;”

or this from Shelley :—

“I see a mighty darkness
Filling the seat of power, and rays of gloom
Dart round, as light from the meridian sun,
Ungazed upon and shapeless ; neither limb,
Nor form, nor outline ; yet we feel it is
A living spirit.”

I do not mean to say that some such expressions may not be found in the classics ; but they are not often used, and these descriptions are intensely *modern* in their vague indefinite grandeur.

With the Furies of Æschylus some have compared the Witches of Shakespeare. I would do the same, not for comparison, but for contrast.

Shakespeare does not merely describe vividly a shape in which he has embodied the idea of some fatal power, such as were these Greek Furies. His witches are not the fearful forms that we behold in these Erinyes. These are hideous realities—whose very sight blasts and petrifies the beholder. Their

effect on the Pythian priestess is *real* in the extreme. When they appeared on the stage they are said to have caused women and children to fall into convulsions. "The serpents," says a writer, "that twine round the head of the Furies are not to be trifled with." They are real and deadly. The effect that they produce on us is very different from that occasioned by Milton's "Death," or Shelley's "Demogorgon."

Compare, for instance, the effect produced by the witches. They do not inspire Macbeth and Banquo with any dread.

"What are these"—

Banquo calmly asks as he first sees them—

"So wither'd and so wild in their attire,
That look not like th' inhabitants of the earth,
And yet are on it? Live you? or are you aught
That man may question? You seem to understand me,
By each at once her chappy finger laying
Upon her skinny lips : you should be women,
And yet your beards forbid me to interpret
That you are so."

Now, it is very clear here that the poet might have produced an effect by describing (as Æschylus) the witches *themselves*, or the dread that they inspired as *witches*. But he does not do so. He does not centre our attention on the finite incorporation, but merely uses the figures of these witches to lead our mind upwards towards some divine agency. Their

weird appearance—especially that master-stroke of a beard—gives one a sufficiently definite picture. We are led to expect something supernatural—we could believe anything happening. But the Furies of Æschylus are in themselves an incorporation of the supernatural, as it were carved out of a solid block of marble ; their Medusa gaze is intolerable—the mind is staggered, we cast our eyes downwards.

The Erinyes of the Greek play were, as has been already shown, creations that had already been bodied forth by the national imagination and accepted by the national faith, and so realized that they had lost their merely allegorical character. It was this strong poetic power, this intense realization, which saved them from being mere allegories and converted them into poetic realities. Shakespeare's witches, on the other hand, are mystical creations. They are neither popular incarnations nor allegories, but symbols of the supernatural appealing to the modern sense of the infinite. I think we may say the same of all his supernatural creations. They are, as it were, projections of the human mind towards the infinite.

Dante's Furies, of which I spoke before, are conceived in both the modern and the ancient spirit ; they are creations such as Dante alone has produced. Their terrific reality consists in their allegorical truth *combined with* their intense personal realization by the poet himself, with which we feel compelled to

sympathize. As merely allegorical figures they would lose all their horror, and as objects of personal experience they would be incredible ; but being both they are true and terrible creations.

Now let us consider Greek tragedies as entire groups.

If it is true that they are sculpturesque, they must have, as much as is possible in such things, concentration.

One's attention must be, as much as possible, riveted to one critical moment, or scene. All accessories that might distract one's mind from this scene before us must be abandoned. What is actually necessary and indispensable for the representation of that one scene must be worked up to the highest possible perfection of form ; and this is what we find to be the case.

As regards the absence of all that might even momentarily distract the attention, we have already seen that a poet may introduce all kind of scenes taken from any time or place—a thing impossible for the painter, far more so for the sculptor. This liberty is used by the Greek poet, but in drama so used that every scene, every *word*, goes straight to the mark. Euripides, in whose plays the severity of the sculpturesque began to be relaxed, was blamed and derided by the comic poet Aristophanes for introducing trivial and incongruous matter.

These two points I must here dismiss. The other,

the concentration of the action of the play into one scene, one slightly extended moment, leads us to the question of the Unities of Time, Place, and Action, which I shall very briefly touch upon.

Unity of Place is said, by those who follow the definitions of Aristotle, to mean that all the action of the play must be confined to one spot. We must not transport our characters hither and thither to the ends of the earth, because it is inconsistent with reason to suppose that they could have possibly travelled all that distance while we are looking at the play.

Now, this depends a good deal on the space of time which our play is supposed to cover: and consistently with this theory of the unity of place, we have a second—the Unity of Time. The critics tell us that the action must in no case extend over more than one day—*i.e.* twenty-four hours. All must be concentrated into this time; all the motives and circumstances leading up to a crisis. What Unity of Action is, we are not told so plainly. Let us take Aristotle's words: "A tragedy is the imitation of a perfect and entire action. Now, a *whole* has a beginning, a middle, and an end." We must, in fact, have in tragedy the complete development of the event, so that it may be a "unity" as regards its action.

These laws were occasionally violated by the ancients, but as a rule we find that they were adhered

to. They all stand or fall together, especially the first two. They are not essential: they are artificial limits within which the Greek dramatists confined themselves, as was natural to their sculpturesque character of mind, and within which limits they could more firmly chisel out the perfect form. They are, as I said, artificial limits; for, as Dr. Johnson very aptly says, if our imagination can in the first instance transport us to Alexandria to see Antony and Cleopatra, the next step, back to Rome, is much easier.

With one more remark, I shall leave this part of our subject.

The most important supernatural agencies employed by the Greek tragedian were those of Nemesis and Ate. Ate was fate in the shape of an irresistible fatality compelling a man to ruin, Nemesis the inexorable fate that followed a man, or a family, from one generation to another.* From neither of these could there be escape. Severe, unflinching, undeviating, inexorable, with sublime composure overruling even the wills of the gods, Fate worked out the inevitable doom. Such are the rigid, statuesque, lines of fatality on which many of the Greek plays are built up.

An instance of this agency of Destiny may be seen in the tragic fate of King Oedipus. His crimes—if

* The respective functions of Ate, Nemesis, Ara, and the Erinyes are not very clearly definable.

such they can be called *—are no perpetration of long-cherished motives, nor the natural product of a certain character, but the unconscious fulfilment of the curse that had fallen on the house of Labdacus. Here there is no need for the poet to awaken our sympathies with the individual character. It is enough that Oedipus is a man, of fellow-feelings with us, overwhelmed by a terrible doom. Our interest is concentrated entirely on that one fateful day when all these horrors are disclosed.

Such a play would be condemned nowadays on account of its want of *motive*; and doubtless to us, who believe rather in the reality of "things depending on ourselves" (as Epictetus says) than of those brought on us by an arbitrary external power, this want of motive deprives a play of value. It must, however, be remembered that the Greek poet almost invariably took as his subject a character and a legend known already to his audience. Thus all the sympathies and antipathies of the spectators were already enlisted, and in plays (such as the "Electra") where there is an underlying motive, that motive did not need the elaboration that is so intensely interesting in the case of "Hamlet." It may be remarked, in passing, that what is called the "irony" of Sophocles consists in the

* ἐπεὶ τὰ γ' ἔργα μου
πεπονθότ' ἐστὶ μᾶλλον ἢ δεδρακότα. (O. C. 266.)

I take here an opportunity of expressing my great admiration of the impassioned but dignified representation of Oedipus on our Dresden stage by Herr Porth.

contrast between the views expressed by the characters on the stage and the facts already known by the audience. Perhaps the best example of this "irony" is to be found in the "Oedipus," where Jocasta's sceptical remarks about and contempt for the oracle are in fine contrast to the terrible truth which was known to the spectators.

All are doubtless aware that the French school of tragedy, including many of the greatest French dramatists, adopted these classical unities, and insisted upon their necessity, contemptuously terming the native romantic drama of England a barbarous and extravagant medley,—in the words which Voltaire applied to Shakespeare—the utterances of a "drunken savage."

These rules not only were held to stringently by the French, but they even made their way thence to England with other pernicious things; and though they struck no deep root, yet they held on a sickly existence under the foreign sky, until the new spring-time of English poetry. We can trace the presence of this false influence in such writers as Dryden, Otway, Addison, and Pope. In Italy, too, at a still later date, tragedies in the severe Greek style were composed by the dramatic writer (I can hardly call him a poet) Alfieri.

Let us now turn to the second subject before us, and consider the nature of the modern spirit; and let us see how the modern spirit demanded a new poetry in which to express itself.

"However highly," says Schlegel, "the Greeks may have succeeded in the beautiful, and even in the moral, we cannot concede any higher character to their civilization than that of a refined and ennobled sensuality."

The want of satisfaction that the higher nature in man feels at the most perfect of merely earthly forms is probably experienced by all. This showed itself among the Greeks. Plato often gives expression to this craving after infinity. His doctrine of *divine* ideas, which I gave you in my first lecture, is a protest against the *material* ideals of the Greek poets. He even, as we have seen, goes so far as to exclude Homer's writings from his imaginary Republic, partly because of the gross forms in which the poet has represented the gods. And it was not confined to one or two of the greatest thinkers. Great numbers of unsatisfied minds, rejecting the popular creed, drank eagerly at the fountains of the new philosophy. Often, indeed, they were satisfied with metaphysical sophistry; often too, finding no satisfaction or certainty, they betook themselves, as is the case also in the present day, to the grossest materialism, and wallowed in the sty of Epicurus. In the time of Thucydides, no less than in the time of St. Paul, the Athenians (who were the intellect of Greece) eagerly flocked to anything that was new—any "strange doctrine"—in their quest for what might quench their thirst for truth. Man, weary with all the im-

perfections of earthly things, with all the seeming cruelty and injustice of nature, hopeless of solving the mystery of existence, passionately demanded truth. And it came. To use the beautiful words of Shelley :—

“ A power from the unknown God,
 A Promethean conqueror, came ;
 Like a triumphant path he trod
 The thorns of death and shame.
 * * * * *
 The powers of earth and air
 Fled from the folding star of Bethlehem ;
 Apollo, Pan, and Love,
 And e'en Olympian Jove,
 Grew weak, for killing Truth had glared on them.
 Our hills and seas and streams,
 Dispeopled of their dreams,
 Their waters turned to blood, their dew to tears,
 Wailed for the golden years.”

It was Christianity, and Christianity alone, that, by teaching man to turn his eyes from the most perfect of material things to a divine perfection, to consider the thought, the motive, more than the act, by bidding him rely not on himself, or his own acts, but on what is external to him and infinitely superior,—it was this, I affirm, that quenched his thirst for truth. Not without reason, after he had wandered through the confined spaces and circles of the earthly Inferno with the ancient poet, was Dante guided up to the illimitable expanse and brightness of heaven by Beatrice—the type of the Christian religion.

I do not wish here to enter upon the question of the formal acceptance of religious doctrine. The difference between the religious and the poetic vision is one that I do not presume to discuss. My purpose is rather to show the influence that Christianity has exercised in fashioning the spirit, and producing the literature of modern days: for, whether we are conscious of the fact or not, its influence *is* a guiding principle in our individual lives, and actuates us more than anything else in our views of things human and divine.

Passing over those long dark ages—the blind infancy of the new world—during which men's minds seemed strangely satisfied with the mere *authority* of revealed truth, while the new spirit had yet found no language; passing over the first mighty efforts of creative imagination conceived in both the modern and the ancient spirit by Dante, let us glance at the drama in the time of Shakespeare, when the true influence of Christianity was beginning to work strongly in England.

This influence, I said, leads us to look at the *motive* rather than the act.

To devise any artistic creation with this tendency must necessitate a disregard of merely the single scene with its few details, that was so elaborately perfected in the Greek tragedies. We must go back over a considerable space of time to search for motives and causes, we must weave together many and various threads.

“Between the acting of a dreadful thing
And the first motion all the interim is
Like a phantasma, or a hideous dream :
The genius and the mortal instruments
Are then in council ; and the state of man,
Like to a little kingdom, suffers then
The nature of an insurrection.”

“The mighty course of human destinies,” says Schlegel, “proceeds, like the changes of the seasons, with measured pace ; great designs ripen slowly ; stealthily and hesitatingly the dark suggestions of deadly malice quit the abysses of the mind for the light of day.” If this be so, and the modern tragedian must picture all this from the “first motion” up to the “acting of the dreadful thing”—how can he possibly limit the action of his play to a single day, or to a single place ? It is impossible—and that too not in tragedy alone. The new subject—the only subject with which the dramatic poet can now hope to interest us—demands new treatment. The reign of the Unities is over. But there must be unity in all poetry, otherwise it is no longer art ; and this unity is especially necessary for drama.

What limits are we to impose on the modern dramatist ?

I think the same that we, in the last chapter, imposed on the imagination of the poet. He must not “put us to confusion,” and thus make his message meaningless by offending our higher Reason. For instance, we find no difficulty in imagining a scene

at Alexandria, in Rome—or even in fairyland, or that equally fabulous Bohemia, “a desert country by the sea.” In that same play, too, our reason is asked to make an imaginative bound—not merely into the extra six hours that a French tragedian in despair added on to the regulation number of twenty-four—but over fifteen years ; while in the second part of “Faust” we are transported suddenly from the Trojan period to the middle ages ! I must confess that in most modern plays, when the bill requests one to imagine that some considerable period has elapsed before the curtain again rises, my imagination utterly fails, stumbles, and falls headlong into the yawning abyss. But in the “Winter’s Tale” and in “Faust” it is not so. The poet’s imagination has bridged the chasm for one. There is consistency and unity in it all : we step securely across the light but firm bridge that he has arched across the gulf.

So much for the effects of the new spirit on the form of the drama. But the new questions of life and all its mysteries, the solution of which we, impatient of idealized form, so eagerly crave for, are scarcely touched by Shakespeare. He paints men as they lived, as they felt. As to their inner and future existence, as to that final goal to which all things are tending, I do not say that these matters did not affect him as a man, but he does not introduce them into that picture of human nature which his plays reflect. “He traces,” says a writer, “the work-

ings of noble or lovely human character to the point, and no further, where they disappear into the darkness of death, and ends with a look *back*, never on towards anything beyond." You remember Hamlet's dying words: "The rest is silence."

In conclusion, I shall ask you to look at still more modern times.

Perhaps the very highest and fullest expression of the modern spirit is to be found in the works of a poet who, though he did not formally accept—even openly rejected—the extraordinarily gross dogmatic religion of his day, nevertheless gives the most ethereal and musical expression to the upward soaring tendency of the modern spirit—that tendency that we see also in our spires and pinnacles of Gothic architecture. In his own words, addressed to the lark, we can most justly address him:—

"Higher still and higher
From the earth thou springest;
Like a cloud of fire
The blue deep thou wingest

And singing still dost soar, and soaring ever singest."

As a contrast to the Greek Prometheus, whom we saw grandly defiant, bound fast to the solitary rock, take Shelley's "Prometheus Unbound." The very title is significant—"Unbound." Here is at once movement, unrestraint—everything the reverse of the statuesque.*

* Æschylus also wrote a "Prometheus Unbound," which is not extant. How different it must have been from Shelley's drama is proved from the fact that it treated of the reconciliation of Prometheus to Zeus.

If I am not greatly mistaken, the "Prometheus Unbound" is the most magnificent *mystical* creation that a poet's imagination has ever conceived.

It announces the downfall of all gross forms of godhead and despotism. Jupiter, or Zeus, disappears down the fathomless abyss, overthrown by the frown of Eternity :—

"The elements obey me not. I sink,
Dizzily down—ever, for ever, down."

Earth, too, the form of material nature, confesses the supremacy of the mind of man :—

"The lightning is his slave : heaven's utmost deep
Gives up her stars, and like a flock of sheep
They pass before his eye, are numbered and roll on :
The tempest is his steed : he strides the air,
And the abyss shouts, from her depth laid bare,
'Heaven, hast thou secrets? Man unveils me : I have none.'"

What, then, shall endure, when all the foundations of the earth are shaken? What is it on which the poet relies, when all mere forms have passed away? Listen :—

"Love, from its awful throne of patient power, . . .
And narrow verge of craglike agony, springs
And folds over the world its healing wings.
Gentleness, Virtue, Wisdom, and Endurance,
These are the seals of that most firm assurance
Which bars the pit over Destruction's strength."

And the poem ends with these lines :—

"To suffer woes which Hope thinks infinite ;
To forgive wrongs darker than death or night ;

To defy Power that seems omnipotent ;
To love and bear ; to hope, till Hope creates
From its own wreck the thing it contemplates ;
Neither to change, nor flatter, nor repent ;
This, like thy glory, Titan, is to be
Good, great and joyous, beautiful and free ;
This is alone life, joy, empire, and victory."

It is the triumph of the infinite over the finite : the song of one who has gazed on a vision of eternal truth, and whose every word vibrates with the emotion which that vision has excited in him. In this—the *vision*—I cannot help thinking that Shelley is the greatest of all modern poets. But in poetic *faculty*, in the power of artistically representing this vision, of revealing this the great secret of Nature, he is, I will not say deficient, but supremely great only in one special sphere. When I called his poetry a song, and when I said that his words vibrated with emotion, I used two expressions peculiarly applicable to *lyric* poetry. As its very name will tell, lyric poetry must be in its form and thought to the highest possible extent *musical*, and must be full of emotion. This very emotion is destructive of distinct form. Lyrics are, or should be, short spontaneous outbursts of feeling. Now, Shelley is eminently a *singer*, a lyric poet. I do not mean to deny that in imaginative creation he is not also a great poet (for the "Prometheus Unbound" gives him a right to that title), but at the

same time I feel that the glory of the eternal vision has overpowered him, and that he is too deeply moved by it to speak of it calmly and in a generally recognizable form. His emotion is not *tranquilized*. Hence that want of form which repels many from his poems, to say nothing of the large class of minds that are repelled by his defiance of formal creeds. But he at least has attempted a higher theme than almost any before him—or after him. If he has partly failed in creating a new form for these new subjects, have any others succeeded better?

I shall now take one more step—it is but a short one—from Shelley to our own day.

In our time, at the present moment in England, to say nothing of other countries, there exists, as there always will exist in a greater or less degree, an intense craving after truth, after certainty. Of those to whom *belief* (whether formalized or not) affords the peace of certainty I do not presume to speak; nor even of those who find what they deem peace in the mere acceptance of religious forms. Of the rest many, as in Athens of old, seek truth in the sophistry of a subtle philosophy; others, despairing of certainty in things unseen, cling passionately to life and its pleasures, or to science and its certainties, devoting themselves to the only reality that they recognize, and wallowing often in gross materialism and sensuality; many again, a vast multitude, like that which Dante describes in his “Inferno,” circle restlessly round and

round, seeking rest and finding none, in the little excitements that every empty novelty can bring them.

How do these feelings impress themselves on the literature of to-day?

In the first we have the philosopher—the self-dependent seeker after truth. He battles vainly against the cruelty and injustice that he sees all around him. Foiled, he stands firm, with pale thoughtful brow, bearing up with almost Promethean grandeur. But at length he must yield. He is no Titan, as Prometheus was. Despair and melancholy seize upon him, or a cynical sneer rises to his lips. Is not this despairing melancholy deeply impressed on our literature?

“I falter where I firmly trod,
And, falling with my weight of cares
Upon the great world’s altar-stairs
That slope through darkness up to God,

“I stretch lame hands of faith, and grope,
And gather dust and chaff, and call
To what I feel is Lord of all,
And faintly trust the larger hope.”

I need hardly quote more. Our greatest poet only too often speaks thus. In such moments “when the light is low and all the wheels of Being slow,” when “Nature, red in tooth and claw with ravine, shrieks against his creed,” the modern poet oftentimes gives way. It is not, as Taine asserts, that we are physically and mentally weaker than our ancestors. It is that in the new quest for unseen truth such as the ancients

never dreamed of, the poet or the philosopher often, when brought face to face with the terrible phantom of nature, losing the only faith that can sustain him, sinks abjectly to the ground. It is from such reasons that what Taine says is only too true: "Digust, mental and bodily degradation, disease, impotence, madness, suicide, at the best a permanent hallucination or a feverish raving—these are nowadays the ordinary issues of the poetic temperament."

As regards those who would satisfy our longings for truth by pointing to sensuous enjoyment as an end, we shall best be silent. "Non ragioniam di lor, ma guarda e passa."

The writers that answer the demand for novelty and excitement are legion; the supply is equal to the demand, and both are immense. They deal in incidents and feeling, neither having the slightest upward tendency; mere finite existencies. It is not that they are commonplace trivial incidents and feelings,—even such may, if properly used, teach us much and direct our thoughts higher. By no means. They are of the first order of magnitude—monstrous—both incidents and feelings. To this class belongs almost every sensational play and sensational novel of the day. And when they belong also to the class that we have passed over, they are not only contemptible but injurious.

The motive that is so sadly wanting in our modern literature and art is faith—no mere blind belief, however

obstinate, no mere complacent optimism—but a living energizing faith in the fact that all this unintelligible tangle of the natural world is in very truth working together for good ; a faith stronger far than the faint-hearted “trust” taught us by Tennyson.

“Oh yet we trust that somehow good
Will be the final goal of ill . . .

* * * * *
Behold, we know not anything ;
I can but trust that good shall fall
At last—far off—at last, to all,
And every winter change to spring.”

We want some of that grand restraint and repose that we see in the Greeks, before we can produce great works of art. With us it is not to be that Promethean sublimity of defiance, that self-reliance of a self-collected soul, but the calm strong faith in the “final goal of ill.” Without this motive we either fritter away our lives with toys and inanities ; or else struggle in our inability to stem the stream, and sink with a cry of despair or a cynical defiance.

We have, I think, at present * a writer, and one who has secured a powerful grasp on the public attention, who is an instance of the last type. I cannot but think that the highest teaching of all the writings of George Eliot amounts to nothing more than a lofty and mournful agnosticism. The mysterious web of life is woven for us, perhaps more deftly and in more

* 1878.

vivid colours than by any other writer, with the sole exception of Shakespeare. But we are left gazing at the tangled maze of things, while the writer seems to smile at us with sad lips, and to say, "This is all. The rest is silence."

The poet, the novelist, the playwright, has yet to be born who *will* tell us what *life means*. He will teach us to have that faith in the deep inner harmony of things, in the good that is to be the final goal of ill, which he himself possesses. He will love to exhibit all the nobler diviner tendencies of man struggling victoriously upwards through the perplexities and trials of earthly things. In this way alone will he secure that form which is necessary for art. Abandoning the defiant attitude of Shelley, he will assume his faith—and a still stronger and deeper faith than his—in the unseen, and his works will possess a majesty and a repose far more grand than even that of ancient art.

CHAPTER IV.

THE MEDÆVAL SPIRIT AND THE REVIVAL.

IN order that we may have some rough and temporary stepping-stone across the ages that separate ancient literature from the poetry of which I wish especially to treat—namely that which arose towards the end of the eighteenth century,—I must now offer a slight sketch of the fundamental characteristics of these ages. In doing this I must, though most unwillingly, leave almost untouched many deeply interesting subjects, such as the rise of early romantic poetry, the marvellous phenomenon of the “Divine Comedy” of Dante, and the origins of our English literature. These subjects, if treated at all, must be treated fully, and to do this does not lie within the scope of my present scheme. I shall therefore, without any attempt to trace the movement in chronological order, speak in general terms of the spirit that (as it appears to me) characterizes the intervening age, and then of the chief reasons to which we may ascribe that wonderful new-birth of natural feeling which we call the Renaissance, or Revival.

After this, we shall have but one more stepping-stone, namely the Classical School as exemplified by Pope. Then I shall hope to speak more in detail of the poetry to which it is my object to direct special attention.

Now we must seek to learn an age not by petty facts, but by tracing the great influences at work among humanity. Let us consider what were some of these influences that led to the Revival.

None will, I suppose, dissent from me when I say that in man, and more especially in the highest developments of the human race, there exist two strong tendencies, which we may call the *religious* and the *natural*. The disturbances in the balance of these two powers, the temporary supremacy of one or the other, the certain rebellion of the conquered against the conqueror, constitute, perhaps, the most important of those influences by which human history is shaped.

I may be addressing some who will not entirely agree with me, but I think it is generally admitted nowadays that the true state of things is when religion and nature are in alliance; when the elevating, purifying power of religion guides and influences our natural tendencies, but does not tyrannize over its natural consort. Such an alliance is brought about by the law of love, bringing, as its result, freedom. This law of love was first given to man by Christianity. But it was not long before the principle was mis-

understood, and in course of time the real meaning of the revelation was entirely lost. Meanwhile the new *form* of religion had gained a vast authority and temporal power. Not only did the Popes, supported by their Guelph allies, grasp at earthly possessions and an earthly sceptre, but they and their subordinates assumed an authority utterly beyond their right in spiritual matters. What was the result?

Even those who opposed her temporal power, as the Ghibellines, conceded to the Church unlimited power in spiritual things—over matters of conscience. Their allegiance to religion consisted in certain formal acts. Men began to draw a distinct boundary between the authority of religion and the dominion of the natural man. In the latter they claimed unfettered license, and the result was a life of indescribable riot and sensuality in obedience to the natural inclinations, combined with a formal homage to the spiritual authority of the Church which satisfied the demands of conscience—such as they possessed.

But among many of the higher and more earnest minds there was an intense desire to live up to the demands of true conscience. Under the circumstances, only one way seemed open to them, and they chose it. Seeing the seemingly hopeless enmity between the two, and the uselessness of compromise, they renounced all allegiance to nature. All natural desires, affections, and objects were looked upon as "earthly,

sensual, and devilish." A life of asceticism, ecstatic rapture, and miracle was the religious life of that age—a life utterly cut off from all that was natural.*

Who does not read the life of even that great and good man St. Francis of Assisi without sadness? Great as the work was that he accomplished in his protest against the luxury and corruption of his times, do we not feel that a few wounds of common human feeling would have enriched him far more than the marks of the miraculous "stigmata" on those emaciated hands and feet? Nay, the stifled sympathy that he had for nature asserts itself in his love for the beasts and birds—a love that they are said to have returned,—and for his "sister water" and "brother fire" and for all natural things, even for "sister death,"—all except the natural man: though indeed, when dying he gazed at his poor worn-out body, he confessed that he had too far ill-used that patient "brother ass." Look at the painters, too, who in that age represented the religious spirit. Those who know the paintings and mosaics of that time will understand what I mean. How is the body of this natural man mostly portrayed? Think

* Even in such a rough summary as this I ought not to leave unnoticed the great difference between the earlier Benedictine period and the Franciscan (from about 1200). Of the former seclusion from the world, cloister and hermit life, was the chief characteristic: of the latter the spiritual excitement consequent on a contact and contest with the external world. In art we recognize this difference in the calm sad dignity of old pictures and mosaics as contrasted with the ecstasies, martyrdoms, and miracles of the later period.

of those majestic figures that loom in the dim apses of many an old basilica. With what a deep unnatural sadness gaze down upon us those "occhi gravi e tardi." Or think of the pictures of saints and martyrs, the poor wizened faces lighted up indeed often with divine rapture but with not a sign of any human feeling, while the skinny limbs, with their knotty joints covered with brown wrinkled parchment, are indeed a type of that mortification of the flesh that was then considered necessary for the attainment of a religious ideal.*

Even after the "cry was Giotto's" this was but gradually changed. In Fra Angelico, too, in spite of the seraphic beauty of expression in his faces, we have not seldom a reminiscence at least of the same spirit; and we can trace its influence in Italian art up to Perugino, the master of Raphael, and even in the first essays of Raphael himself.

There is one picture, a fresco (perhaps by Orgagna) in the Campo Santo at Pisa, which is one of the best representations of the unnatural divorce that existed in this age between nature and religion. It is called the "Triumph of Death." In one part of the fresco the natural man, in the shape of certain richly dressed kings on horseback, is brought face to face with death under the form of decaying corpses

* Note here the fact that intensity of feeling is shown in the *minute details* of Pre-Raphaelism—as explained later. All their feeling was concentrated on this point, other channels being dammed up.

(possibly *their own* future corpses), from which they are turning away with signs of horror. In other parts fiends are flying about the scene in all directions—ludicrous black things with bats' ears and monkeys' tails. It is an orgy of devils—the triumph of supernatural evil. In another spot there is a picture of Death himself, hovering with ready scythe over a group of revellers—young Florentines, such as lived in Dante's city, such as Boccaccio describes in all their riotous extravagance. The whole picture is an anathema launched by the religious spirit of the middle ages against nature—that nature which in its unbridled license religion had excommunicated.

Not only society—not so *much*, I might say, society—but man himself was divided against himself.

“ The state of man,
Like to a little kingdom, suffered then
The nature of an insurrection.”—

On the one side was the “brute within the man,” rampant and riotous; on the other the spiritual nature loathing its fleshly vesture, and striving to cast off the polluted thing and to soar heavenwards in ecstatic visions.

In such an unnatural state of things a compromise was necessary—and all the more so after the Church had been brought into closer contact with the world by the growth of her temporal power and the influence of the Franciscans. Religion, if she was to secure her authority, must throw a sop to this rampant Cerberus.

We all know what that sop was. Penance, formal acts of devotion, gifts to mother Church, bought her easy indulgence. As an instance in literature take the "Decamerone" of Boccaccio. It consists of stories told by a band of revellers who had taken refuge in a country villa from the Black Death—the terrible plague of 1348, which was desolating Florence. To dispel their care and fear they indulged in riotous living, and the stories which they are described as relating to each other exhibit the dissipation and license of the times, especially among monks and nuns, in vivid colours. What did the Church, the natural controller of morals, say to it? At first she banned it; placed it on the Index of prohibited books. But the adverse influence was too strong for her. In 1573, about the age of the Revival in England, "it was published," as Mr. Gladstone tells us, "at Florence with express approval from the Roman Inquisition, and with a brief from the Pope, which granted the copyright to the publishers, and excommunicated all who should anywhere infringe it. It had been corrected: but how? Mainly by the omission of *one* of the hundred tales, and by the general omission of ecclesiastical personages, for whom schoolmasters and students were commonly substituted."

But the time was fast approaching—had already come—when the higher nature of man was to reassert its rights, and launch *its* anathema against the un-

natural religion of the day, and the iniquities which, side by side with dogma and ceremony, it tolerated and fostered.

At first this anathema took the form of denunciation and abuse, and was launched, not only by sceptics and heretics, but by such a true and earnest son of the Church as Dante himself. Nothing could exceed the scorn and contempt which he pours on the policy and crimes of the Roman Church and her pontiffs. Poets and painters vied with each other (we see this even in our English Chaucer) to depict the corruption of the ecclesiastics. No picture of hell was complete without its fat sensual monks and priests.

But abuse and denunciation cannot satisfy. Discarding the false teaching of the Church, men created a religion for themselves. It was the religion of Idealism,* in which a pure and lofty human love was made the object of worship and veneration. You all have heard of Beatrice, the little daughter of Folco Portinari, whom, when Dante was only nine years old, he first saw and loved, and whom, when she was soon after taken from the earth, he idealized in his great poem. Less ideal perhaps, but still ideal, was Petrarch's Laura, to whom are addressed most of his sonnets. Even as late as Michael Angelo we find the same sort of religious worship for woman's love, ex-

* It must be remembered that this Idealism is a totally different thing from the Idealism of Greek art of which I spoke before. We can recognize its presence in the poems of Surrey, whose sonnets are addressed to his ideal love Geraldine, or Lady Elizabeth Fitzgerald.

pressed in some of those sonnets which add the title of poet to those of painter, sculptor, and architect.

Now let us leave Italy, and turn to those northern nations in whom we are at present more interested.

In them a similar reassertion of nature took place, but neither was the authority of the false religion so supreme among them, nor was the consequent rebound of the natural affections towards depravity so great. The true Christian spirit had penetrated these peoples far more deeply than the southern nations, and the flood of northern conquest had spread their sentiments over a great part of Europe. "The rough but honest heroism of the northern conquerors," says a German writer (Schlegel), "by its admixture with Christian sentiments, gave rise to chivalry. With chivalry was associated a new and purer spirit of love, which was now revered as the acme of human excellence, and, maintained by religion itself under the image of a virgin mother, infused into all hearts a mysterious sense of the purity of love."

Thus, in the northern races natural passion allied itself largely with religious sentiment, and no violent reaction was occasioned. Though, as I have said, Chaucer does level his shafts at the corrupt lives of the ecclesiastics (take for instance his monk and friar in the Prologue), he can also paint the "good man of religion," the priest who neither lived a dissolute life, nor shut himself up in his cloister and indulged

in asceticism and raptures, but, visiting his distant fold in spite of rain and thunder,—

“Christes lore, and his apostles twelve
He taughte, and first he folwede it himselve.”

In Chaucer we find none of that intense struggle which Dante waged against his age, sustaining himself in exile, an exile both of soul and body, by his own gigantic strength. All is calm and peaceful in the English poet, like that sweet season of spring, with a description of which his great poem opens.

Such were a few of the first symptoms of the natural reaction against a false religious system. In Italy and other southern countries the gulf yawned too widely between the two—a gulf which has never closed :—

“They stood aloof, the scars remaining,
Like cliffs that had been rent asunder :
A dreary sea now flows between.”

In England and Germany it was otherwise. No sudden and violent reaction set in. It is, of course, a mistake to suppose that the capricious act of a sensual monarch suddenly and violently ejected Romanism together with Papal supremacy from England. Nature and religion had always to some extent gone hand in hand in this country. The Reformation merely removed an obstacle to their closer alliance.*


Still, religion had assumed a false position ; and nature did assert herself before the Reformation, and,

* See Hallam's *Const. Hist.* ii.

when set at liberty, did indulge in the excesses natural to a reaction.

New worlds, with all their undreamed-of riches and splendour, were at that time being revealed. The true shape of the earth itself was demonstrated ; the system of the universe and its unsuspected grandeurs were revealed ; the art of printing was discovered ; modern Science was born—soon to become a new and gigantic power. Wealth and industry brought in their train the comforts and luxuries of life.

“They improved agriculture to such an extent,” says Taine, “that in half a century the produce of an acre was doubled.” The ruin of Antwerp by the Duke of Parma sent numberless merchants and manufacturers to our land. The destruction of the Armada opened the seas to our supremacy. “Before the time of Elizabeth, the country houses of gentlemen were little more than straw-thatched cottages.” Soon, however palaces sprang up, fitted with all the luxuries that wealth could procure. “They dressed magnificently, with doublets of scarlet satin, cloaks of sable, velvet shoes embroidered with gold.” “It is a common thing,” says Burton in his “Anatomy of Melancholy,” “to put a thousand goats and a hundred oxen on a coat, and to carry a whole manor on one’s back.” The descriptions that we read of the masques and fêtes and shows at the court of Elizabeth are all in the same strain. It was a revel of all the natural senses of man—“a vigorous mundane vitality,” as Prof. Dowden calls it : the banquet, not the unlicensed carnival, of the senses.



Perhaps, however, of all influences of this age, one of the greatest was the revival of ancient, especially Greek, learning, which, through such men as Colet and Erasmus, found its way (about 1500) from Italy to England. Men, beholding for the first time the glories of the Greek drama, and the ethereal loveliness of Plato's philosophy, turned away with scorn and contempt from the wizened sophistries of the schools, much of which, gathered from the systems and formulæ of Seneca and Aristotle, had been infused into the doctrines of the Mediæval Church. Petrarch was, as Hallam says, "the first and real restorer" of classical learning; but his own was confined mostly to the Latin classics, though he made an ineffectual attempt to master Greek. Cicero Virgil and Boethius were with him, as with Dante, the greatest of the ancients. Not long after the death of Petrarch (1374) numerous Greek manuscripts and Greek learning were brought over to Italy by scholars, such as Chrysoloras, and later by exiles from Constantinople, after the capture of that city by Mahomet II. in 1453. The first half of the fifteenth century was also distinguished by the recovery of many Latin manuscripts through the exertions of one man, Poggio Bracciolini. To him we owe no less than eight orations of Cicero and twelve comedies of Plautus. At Florence, under the patronage of the Medici, and elsewhere, Greek learning was assiduously studied, and with it natural freedom and

beauty began once more to reign. We see the outcome of this spirit of freedom in the great revival of pictorial art which had begun under Giotto, and which found its perfection in Raphael. One can even trace the progress of this new growth in his works, till the stiff attenuated figure in a Peruginesque attitude gives place to a Herculean frame fully developed even in children. Michael Angelo, too,—who does not know his wondrous representations of the human form? No one who has stood under the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel and before the “Last Judgment” can forget the picture of struggling humanity—human nature in its most vigorous development. Then Giorgione, Titian, Tintoretto, Palma, Paolo Veronese, and others of the Venetians,—what a revelling in the splendour of form and colour do we see in their works! what feasts, what processions, what a display of all that is gorgeous and magnificent!—poms and pageants, such as actually existed when the Doges reigned in Venice.

What, then, should we expect in the literature of that age?

It was not a time for great questions about the destiny of man or the meaning of nature, nor for mournful despair at the injustice of Fate, nor for denunciation of a domineering falsehood. The poet is inspired with the delicious liberty of the age; he too revels in nature. He must, however, as an artist, find some form in which to express himself.

His all-important subject is man—no longer the ascetic or bacchanal, but man with his incomparable faculties for good or evil placed in the midst of this earthly scene. How shall he depict man with his affections and virtues and vices?

There are two great English poets of this age, whom I will choose as illustrations. They are Spenser and Shakespeare.

Spenser chose a form. Just as the Greek poets adopted the popular mythology and introduced the Gods and Furies and Heroes on the stage, and in their epics, so Spenser chose a mythology—that of knights and dragons and enchanters—to represent human virtues and vices. I think we must allow that he did wrong. This mythology never deeply penetrated the minds of the less sensitive and imaginative northern nations. The Gods, and Dryads, and all the lovely and hideous shapes with which the Greeks peopled nature, were to them more than mere allegories. They were realities with a definite meaning in the order of natural things: and as such we too accept them. But these knights and magicians and dragons of Spenser are to us, and were even to the writer, intruders into nature. The mind has ever to be aware of the deception. The red crosse knight, Britomartis, Duessa, and the dragon are all mere symbols to us. What do we care for the "dreadful beast"? He is not half so terrible as Dante's Geryon (though Spenser has borrowed a good deal from

Dante's monster in the description), for there the poet has actually led us down to hell, and we are prepared for things monstrous.

“ By this the dreadful beast drew nigh to hand,
Halfe flying and halfe footing in his haste,
That with his largenesse measured much land,
And made wide shadow under his huge waste. . . .

“ His flaggy winges, when forth he did display,
Were like two sayles, in which the hollow wynd
Is gathered full, and worketh speedy way :
And eke the pennes, that did his pineons bynd,
Were like mayne-yardes with flying canvas lynd. . . .

“ His huge long tayle, wound up in hundred foldes,
Does overspred his long bras-scaly back,
Whose wreathed boughtes when ever he unfolds,
And thicke entangled knots adown doth slack,
Bespotted as with shieldes of red and blacke,
It sweepeth all the land behind him farre,
And of three furlongs doth but little lacke ;
And at the point two stinges infixed arre,
Both deadly sharp, that sharpest steele exceeden farre.

“ But his most hideous head my tongue to tell
Does tremble ; for his deepe devouring jawes
Wyde gaped, like the griesly mouth of hell,
Through which into his darke abysses all ravin fell.

“ And, what more wondrous was, in either jaw
Three ranckes of yron teeth enraunged were,
In which yett trickling blood and gobbets raw
Of late devoured bodies did appeare.”

A wonderful description ! But though the poet says his tongue trembles to tell of the hideous head, does

one not feel aware of the deception? Those "yron teeth" have none of the terrible reality possessed by the snakes that twine themselves round the Medusa's head.

No, this is not the way to excite our sympathies for the good, or to make us feel the loathsomeness of vice. These allegorical knights and ladies and dragons are not true poetic creations; they are not *realities* such as Aeschylus, Dante, and Shakespeare have produced for us.

The great value of the "Fairie Queen" lies in the wonderful vividness and splendour of the scene as depicted by the poet, and its transparent crystalline atmosphere—such as one may see in Perugino's pictures. In this transparency and exuberance Spencer resembles Homer. He is never ashamed to put down every thought, however childish, redundant, or trivial it may seem, that can expand and amplify—thoughts that the reader has often anticipated, but is pleased to find so beautifully expressed. It is this luxuriance of poetic material which has won for Spencer the title of the "poets' poet," a title which, as we shall see later, may be applied for similar reasons also to Keats.

But we, who are no poets, need more than poetic material.

I have often longed that amid this lovely natural scene were wandering, not knights and enchanters and dragons, but men and women—beings that are

in themselves far more real, far more interesting, and far better representations of the virtues and vices than any allegorical characters.*

And so thought Shakespeare. His was the same subject as Spenser's. He too had to choose a form in which to represent man and all his affections. He had nothing to do with Destiny or deep questionings. Man and nature lay before him. What form did he take? All the mythology of the ancient or mediæval world was open to him, if he chose to accept it. Or he might invent a new earth, or some supernatural scene, as Dante imagined hell, purgatory, and paradise. No : he saw that earth itself—the common earth that we tread,—and men, such as we may meet and jostle against any day, were his true material. He chose the drama ; for in the drama he could most directly and substantially represent the virtues and vices of human nature, not separately in personifications, but as they actually exist combined in the individual. As I said when speaking of him before, he paints men and women as they lived and thought and felt. As to the mysteries of existence, as to the final goal of all things, although such questions undoubtedly must have affected him as a man, he does not allow them to mar the mirrored picture of human character, which his plays present. Though Hamlet may cast a glance towards the mystery

* Spenser accepted the *theory* of Idealism. This is apparent, for instance, from his hymns to heavenly love and beauty. But he does not seem to have realized it.

of death, it still remains for him an unsolved and insoluble mystery—a sleep, an undiscovered country. Death is the limit that the poet imposed upon himself. His work was to represent life. “The rest is silence.”

Such was the form that Shakespeare chose for representation—human *life*. It is true that he uses now and then, as an embodiment of some *human* motive, a supernatural form, such as a ghost, or a fairy: but how different are these from the Gods and Furies of the Greek stage! Their reality depends solely on their relation to the human character—of which they are, as it were, “simulacra,” or projections—and they are merely used as agencies for developing that character.

After what has been said of the conditions of true poetic creation, I need hardly here enter upon the question whether Shakespeare’s characters are *imitations* from nature. The fact that his men and women are to us real existences—more so, indeed, than many a man and woman whom we have seen and touched—is a proof that they are true creations and not “studies” from nature. Therefore, granting that Shakespeare’s “objectivity” (as it is called) does not consist in a meaningless reproduction of human character, but that his men and women—and events, too—are real by virtue of the ideas that they represent, let us briefly consider the general nature and worth of these ideas.

To judge of such things in an objective poet

such as Shakespeare, we must not seek for allegories in his characters, nor look for any direct attempt to indoctrinate; but we must notice the general tendency and the effect that his plays have on us.

Now, though I said that Shakespeare never attempts to draw aside the veil of the future in his plays, is his estimate of truth such as a man would form who saw nothing but the appearances of the material world? Are we induced by his plays to form such an estimate ourselves, and to believe in the only truth and power thus recognizable, namely the truth and power of material success and happiness? Consider, for instance, "King Lear."

It is no grand irony that in this play points out to us evil triumphant. It is a strong faith, which dares to represent goodness as its own reward, independent of all questions of success—superior to all accidents of defeat, or to death itself.

And even where Shakespeare does not so distinctly display his strong faith, and appeal to us for sympathy with the good, yet his strong healthy vitality is in itself of no little value.

In both these points I would again contrast with him one of the great writers of the present day. George Eliot, as Shakespeare, presents us with pictures of real life painted with wondrous skill, with no direct attempt to draw a moral therefrom. But while Shakespeare never leaves us in doubt as to the true nature of good and evil, and thus supplies

us with a clue to the maze of life, and thus endues his characters with a reality, George Eliot, if I have understood her teaching, shows us with a mournful irony the hopeless tangle, and unable to solve it, tells us, as our only consolation, that the thing is insoluble. Though we may at times discern a faint trust and a longing that after all the victory may be with the good, the strong *sincere* faith is failing which alone can make the thing a reality to us ; for, as Carlyle says, sincerity is all-essential in art ; and no sincere faith in the absolute unconquerable might of good can spring from Positivism. Her characters are therefore, to me, meaningless and lifeless—they have nothing to tell me of that life the appearance of which they so cleverly simulate. Moreover, with regard to the different effect produced on the mind, to speak for myself, that produced by a play of Shakespeare's, even when not elevating and ennobling, is at least bracing and healthy ; that left by a work of George Eliot is enervating and distinctly unhealthy.

It is true that for us, with our still unsatisfied cravings for truth beyond what the mere phenomena of human character can afford us, these dramas are not all sufficient. A later outburst of poetry, very different from that of the Elizabethan period, has excited, if it has not allayed, our thirst for the artistic revelation of far loftier truths. But till we can gain that calm faith and repose necessary for an artistic treatment of this new subject—until that still

greater poet than Shakespeare shall arise to create a new form in which to body forth the new vision—we shall do well at times to fall back on his strong vital humanity: at times, I say, for in some moods his strength is powerless to affect us. But especially is his bracing reviving influence of value in those moods of cynicism and doubt to which all men, but of all men we moderns, are most particularly liable. "There are seasons," says a recent writer on Shakespeare, "when a sterile world-weariness is induced by the superficial barrenness of life. The people we know seem to shrivel up and become wizened and grotesque. The places we have loved transform themselves into ugly little prisons. The ideals for which we have lived appear absurd patterns, insignificant arabesques, devoid of idea and of beauty. Our own heart is a most impertinent and unprofitable handful of dust. . . . To this mood of barren world-weariness the Elizabethan drama comes—with no direct teaching, but with the vision of life; and that vision represents a reality. These things, then, being actual, how poor and shallow a trick of the heart is cynicism!"

There is a great name that I have left unmentioned, and that of a man who, equally with Spenser and Shakespeare, is a typical growth of that age. It is Bacon that I mean. Bacon's mind was the very converse of the poetic: it was the scientific, the analytic,—the mind that sought for, and drew its

whole sustenance from knowledge of facts. Now, in such an age as that of the revival, when all were turning in the deliciousness of a new liberty towards nature, we find that Bacon's greatest claim to fame consists in a similar impulse. He may justly be called, as Hallam calls him, the father of modern science ; not because he made discoveries in science (his attempts in that direction having proved ineffectual on account of his not being able to use the machine, the Organon, that he had constructed), but because he first propounded the method on which all true scientific research is conducted, or rather first so defined and organized it that it was henceforth of practical use. Abandoning the unscientific dogmatic system of the past, which had beheld astronomy changed into astrology, and science into the black art, he insisted on a special process of *induction*—a methodized appeal to nature for facts, from which to infer a law. I shall, perhaps, speak of this method more fully on some other occasion.* Here I merely remark that his great discovery, by which he pointed out (as has been well said) the promised land, as Moses from Pisgah,—a promised land that he, as Moses, never entered,—was a natural product of the

* The Baconian methods were something beyond mere imperfect induction from experience. For a full discussion of their nature and value, and their difference from Aristotelian and other methods, see Hallam's Lit. Hist. iii. 3. It must be, however, remarked that Bacon's claims as a discoverer of a new method are at the present day largely disallowed.

age in which all men were turning towards and revelling in nature. Certainty—to be gained by an appeal to natural facts—that was Bacon's watch-word: and as far as scientific certainty is concerned he was right. Bacon, if any man, has deserved to inherit the title given by Dante with his unerring accuracy to Aristotle—"the master of those who *know*"—sovereign in the realm of empirical knowledge.

This inductive method Bacon deemed necessary for obtaining results in other than scientific subjects. Perhaps as regards the investigations into the laws of the human mind he was still justified in using it, for such inquiry is a science and its conclusions are scientific truths. But there is a domain higher than that of fact-truth, and Bacon, finding the uselessness of his method here, though he professes a deep reverence for matters of faith, denies that we can attain a certainty in what is beyond the test of experience. He is, indeed, though he endeavours to conceal the fact, a positivist; and of all false philosophies positivism, which is one of the most specious, is the one most fatally destructive of our belief in those truths of which nature and art are heaven-sent messengers.

CHAPTER V.

THE CLASSICAL SCHOOL AND THE NEW REVIVAL.

WE have now * considered some of the chief features of the poets who wrote during the period that followed the golden age of Shakespeare and Spenser, in which age we must also include, though in time later, Milton. We have seen how their characteristics are, on the one hand, extravagance and hyperbole, due to an abuse of natural liberty, and on the other hand subtlety of thought and language, conceits, remote analogies, curious acrostic puzzles and metaphysical riddles—the result of a study of the human mind and passions from an unpoetic point of view. The faculty that treats a subject in this manner, that merely treats (although in rhythmical language) of the *appearances* of the world of mind and passion, is a faculty far removed from, and to some extent the very converse of the poetic. No creation is attempted, and

* The lecture here alluded to has been omitted from the present series.

consequently the necessity of a form in which to create is not perceived. Naturally, therefore, form, being neglected, disappears.

Art requires form.

To make ourselves clear on this point, before I speak of the reaction against these formless verse-makers, and the adoption of a form by the new school, let us consider what we mean by the word "form."

I do not wish to launch myself upon, or ask you to follow my vain wanderings over, a shoreless ocean in the quest for that Earthly Paradise where the mystery of spirit and matter, of perfection in imperfection, is revealed to the human mind. But I think we may safely assume that for form of any kind—whether in art or elsewhere—to be of any value, it must be a manifestation of spirit, however that manifestation may be produced.

Form is a necessary co-efficient of all material, and also of all intellectual, existence. So necessary is it, that Dante, paradoxically perhaps, but profoundly calls the *soul* the body's form.* Without accepting this expression literally, we may at least allow that matter without the influence of spirit is formless and meaningless, and that all true form is dependent on—is the manifestation of—spirit. And we have

* This thought seems to have been borrowed from Thomas Aquinas. It is repeated by Spenser in his "Hymn in Honour of Beauty." Form was called "*natura naturans*" (the condition of existence) by the schoolmen.

seen that the real existence of everything in art and in nature is dependent on the idea that it represents. Therefore true form in a work of art is the direct and vital development of the idea: and when it is not this, but adventitious, it is merely an imitation, "twice removed" (to use Plato's words) "from the thing as it was originally created."

And yet this mere accomplishment of imitating a form in its external appearance has conferred on not a few the name of poet.

Let us for a few moments consider this question.

A poet must have *vision, poetic faculty, and accomplishment*, i.e. the mastery over material. To use my former definition, poetry is the production of a form which represents an idea.

And here I would remark that the word "poet" originally meant a "*maker*," so that one may with all appropriateness say that *ποίησις*, or the production of form, is essential in poetry. As an illustration of the real meaning of the word, viz. production of a form, one might cite the fact that *ἐποίησε* is the word found inscribed on ancient sculptures to denote the act, not of making verses, but the formation of such a defined and palpable entirety as a statue. When used therefore in its present ordinary sense, the word "poet" may without inaccuracy be said to involve the essential of formative power—and poetry to necessarily forego form.

It does not, however, follow that poetic form

is at all similar to the sculpturesque: as, indeed, we saw some time ago, when I tried to show how the characteristic of sculpture was limitation and concentration, and consequently perfection of material form within these concentrated limits, whereas that of poetry was an indefinite power of extension, regardless of time and space. I at that time attempted also to express what I believed to be essential for the entirety of a *poetic* conception, showing that imagination is not arbitrary and lawless but has laws of its own—laws not necessarily in harmony with those of nature, but equally binding. We also saw how the Greek spirit was sculpturesque, and how Greek poetry partook of this sculpturesque form, which was necessarily abandoned when idealized material objects lost their value, and the new spirit, with all its infinite aspirations after spiritual truth, demanded a new form in poetry.

Now there are two things to be noted especially in this:—

Firstly, that perfection of external form—namely, the exquisite finish and symmetry of thoughts and words, such as is found in Greek poetry, especially in the Greek dramatists—is by no means essential for poetry; the perfection of poetic form consisting solely in the *entirety* of the imaginative creation. This exquisite perfection of external form in the Greeks being a *natural development*, is true and admirable. It is impossible to divide spirit from its *truly*

developed form ; spirit and matter being mysteriously intermingled in whatever *lives*. But even the most highly wrought material form, uninspired with spirit, is a dead thing—a nonentity ; and we must in poetry demand a living reality, not a dead form, however exquisite.

As an illustration of this I would cite, on the one hand, as dead forms, the productions of the so-called Classical School, comprising Pope and Addison, and with them we may class some, at least, of the French dramatists and Alfieri ; while on the other hand, as examples of truly classical spirit in a true form, because the natural outcome of the poet's conception, I would take Shakespeare's "Coriolanus," "Julius Cæsar," and "Troilus and Cressida ;" also some of the works of Gray, Keats, and Goethe, and the "Jason" of our present poet William Morris.

Secondly, this material form being, when not a development of the poetic spirit, a dead and worthless thing, we must not be deceived into appraising a poet by such form. How, then, are we to appraise him ? I think Wordsworth tells us in his lines where he speaks of the "vision," the "faculty," and "the accomplishment." Vision of ideal truth, and the faculty of embodying such vision in a form—those are the necessary endowments of a poetic *nature*, and if a man is to be a poet in the full sense of the word, recognized, and therefore of use to others, he must also possess the "accomplishment of verse." Now,

if he has no vision, or that vision be a lie and delusion, then a man's would-be creation is no reality, but a phantom. And this is the falsest of all falsities, for it most nearly resembles the true. Above all things let us beware of appraising such as poets.

Again, a man may have the vision, and yet may want the *faculty* of bodying forth what he has seen in an artistic form—such a one lacks the creative faculty, and is therefore no poet. He is *not* the unrecognized poet of whom Wordsworth speaks :—

“ Oh, many are the poets that are sown
By nature ! men endowed with highest gifts—
The vision and the faculty divine,—
Yet wanting the accomplishment of verse ; ”

for such a man *has* the faculty divine—the creative power,—and only wants “accomplishment,” that is a mastery over his material: but the one of whom I speak is without the creative faculty, and is therefore no poet.

In this class are to be found many estimable men who may for many years labour under the delusion that their mission is to propagate by means of poetry the truths that they have seen. Some of them never discover their mistake, in spite of all their failures ; others, after a few pangs of keenest disappointment, betake themselves to other methods, and find their predestined missions in life.

But there is a large class of men—even among those who are considered true poets—who have

neither vision nor creative power, but who, by means of natural talents, such as a retentive and associative memory and imitative facility, and by assiduous cultivation of these talents (which are capable of extraordinary development), have acquired a certain mastership over poetic material. It is an end, and it is no despicable end, of true criticism to distinguish genuine poetry from such imitations; and possibly the principles that have now been laid down may help us to discern what is worthless from what is true—for ourselves, if not for others.

And now let us turn to the period that is first under consideration, and look at facts.

Broadly stated, the facts are these: (1) the development of a superficial and false refinement and elegance in life, attended by a similar change in the verses of the day; (2) an adoption in poetry of an admiration for and affectation of classical form, which, being adopted and not naturally developed, was a dead and worthless thing.

But facts have causes; and this exotic classicism, imported *via* France from ancient Greece, will not take root unless the soil is prepared for it; nor will this false elegance and refinement, also to a great extent an importation from France, find acceptance unless the demand for it has been created. You can import things from other countries, but they will not live unless they find a congenial soil and air. The Colorado beetle has been imported into England

—but we do not fear its ravages there: it cannot live in our climate. Yellow fever may come to our ports: but it seems incapable of propagating itself, even in our crowded and filthy cities. French immorality and grossness may be brought over by the restored Stuarts, but when the soil prepared for it by Puritanism is exhausted, it will soon die out.

The extravagance of the post-Renaissance poetry, in which all artistic form was flung to the winds—except perhaps by Dryden—was inevitably followed by its opposite.

At first disgust ensued, and men betook themselves—as many do in matters of morals also—to condemning the poetry of their day for its boorish inelegance. It was ill-bred—“bad form,” as the slang of the present day expresses it. Gradually the well-bred polished courtier and poet, with his spruce wig, his posies and nosegays and scents and love-letters, took the place of the unmannerly rioter. I do not mean to say that the stream did not run as turbid and thick and foul beneath this smooth surface, as ever it did in the foaming violence of the first days of the Restoration, though on the surface all was polish and refinement. Pope himself, when seen in his true colours, without his veneer, is as hideously coarse as anything that can be found.

Of such a character, then, is the poetry of this period—pretty little verses *à propos* of nosegays, scent-bottles, dead lapdogs, locks of hair, gloves,

girdles, cups of tea, and silver pens—little verses for ladies' albums.

Early examples of these may be found in the verses of Dorset, Buckingham, Roscommon, Denham, and Edmund Waller, of whom some wrote even before the appearance of "Paradise Lost." In this period too, as in all periods of declining morals and art, we find Satire—on the side of the Puritans, Andrew Marvell; and as an outcome of the Puritan overthrow, the "Hudibras" of Samuel Butler.

But it is not my purpose to detain you over this transitionary period. I merely mention it as a harbinger of that so-called classical or critical school of poetry, which combined with these elegancies of court and boudoir versemakers an affectation of ancient purity of form.

We see this combination in Addison; for, much as we may admire the lovable character of the man and the natural purity of his mind, we cannot but observe and lament the influence of the false refinements of the day on his writings. All have, I suppose, read his and Steele's little elegancies in the *Spectator*. Now, when Addison betook himself to verse-making this elegant restraint and love for correct form showed itself in his adoption of the ancient rules of art, such as the law of the three dramatic unities—or, rather, those rules as they had been modified and legalized by the French tragedians.

"Addison," says Schlegel, "undertook to purify English tragedy by bringing it into compliance with the supposed rules of good taste. We might have expected . . . that he would have endeavoured to imitate the Greek models; . . . but he produced nothing but a tragedy after the French model. His 'Cato' is a feeble and frigid piece, almost destitute of action, and without" (what, of course, is necessary in sculpturesque drama) "one truly overpowering moment." This "Cato" excited a burst of applause at its first appearance—a fact which shows how much men were beginning to crave for form of some kind.

It is not, however, Addison whom I wish to take as the representative of this critical or classical school—but Alexander Pope.

Pope is undoubtedly a great master of verse. In his writings one finds the perfection of what I called a mastery over material, displayed in the nice selection of language, in melodious rhythm, in the equipoise and antithesis of his periods, and in epigrammatic force.

So much for his material. Has he, however, any use for this material? What has he to say to us? And does he say it in a poetic form?—that is, has he vision and faculty?

This is a question which I think each of us should decide for himself by actual study of Pope's works. To give an opinion in an individual case with regard

to what is merely a subjective truth, and expect or wish others to accept it as of general application to all minds, is absurd. As I say of Dryden, so also I say of Pope—there may be those to whom he is of worth as a poet; and to all of us in some moods he may be such. Let us, at all events, decide this thing each for himself—keeping in mind the fundamental principles by which we are to judge of a poet.

In our judgment of Pope, however, we have one very weighty witness for the prosecution—and that is *himself*; although, even when a man's own opinion seems to testify against him, one should not take that opinion for more than it is worth. It is only *opinion*, after all.

Let us, however, look at a few of his theories and their results.

As a boy, Pope had seen "Glorious John," as Dryden was called, and had been deeply impressed by the sonorous magnificence of his verses. It was not long before he began to practise this same art—the art of making verses; which his father used to correct, and to dignify, after many revisions, with the name of "good rhymes." Mr. Stopford Brooke tells us that Pope wrote "excellent verse at the age of twelve," and Dr. Johnson says that the poet "could not remember when he first began to make verses." It reminds one of what Ovid says of himself, when a boy: "Whatever I tried to say turned out a verse."

This fact of his having contracted the habit so early of "lipping in numbers" is significant,—especially when we look at his maturer theory and practice.

Let us first hear his theory.

In the first place to Pope, according to his own confession, poetry was an *art of words* and nothing more. To correct and recorrect, to polish and point, to elaborate form to the perfection of a statue till (as Horace expresses it) one's finger-nail passes smoothly over every joining without perceiving the flaw—such was his art of poetry, as regards its form, and to him form was its prime necessity (not condition) of existence. Naturally he classes together poetry and criticism. The poet is to defy the nail of the critic. The critic to find the flaw.

"Poetry and criticism," he says, "are by no means the universal concern of the world, but only the affair of idle men who write in their closets, and of idle men who read there."

Again: "I confess it was want of consideration that made me an author; I writ because it amused me; I corrected because it was as pleasant to me to correct as to write; and I published because I was told I might please such as it was a credit to please." And one knows well who it was that Pope wished to please—his illustrious patrons. As a specimen of the anxiety that he displays in such correction, let us take the opening of his "Iliad." I will quote the various versions, as given by Johnson in his "Lives of the

Poets ;" the whole of the first book of this translation is said to be similarly filed and polished by innumerable after-corrections.

{ The wrath of Peleus' son, the dreadful spring }
 { Of all the Grecian woes, O Goddess, sing, }
 { The stern Pelides { wrath } O Goddess, sing, }
 { Of all the { rage, } the fatal spring. }
 { { woes of Greece } }
 { { Grecian woes } }

{ That wrath which hurled to Pluto's gloomy reign }
 { The souls of mighty chiefs untimely slain. }
 { That strewed with { warriors } dead the Phrygian plain, }
 { { heroes } }
 { And { peopled the dark hell with heroes slain }
 { filled the shady hell with chiefs untimely slain. } }

This is no elaboration of the artistic form (such as Goethe praises) for the better bodying forth of an idea, but a mere elaboration of diction.

In this translation of Homer he has, as Dr. Johnson says, used almost every happy combination of words or elegant phrase that then existed in the English language. It is a cento of expressions collected from former authors, from whose writings he seems to have gleaned most indefatigably, keeping lists and collections of words and phrases.

Starting with such an idea of poetry, it was but natural that Pope should endeavour to cultivate this art of words as the proper end of his profession. He looked in vain for masters among the moderns,

but found them among the Greeks and Romans. To him these writers were, as indeed they are, perfect masters of expression, but nothing else—though they are much else. Horace, of all others, was his infallible guide—Horace, who in style is perhaps one of the greatest, as in the loftier qualities of a poet he is one of the least of the ancients. In what estimation Pope held such a poet as Homer may be seen from his translation, in which the majestic simplicity of the original has wholly evaporated. Under what he supposed to be Greek form, Pope had less of the Greek spirit than many a schoolboy. Both Homer and every other poet, himself included, he appraised by their mastery of expression—as if even Homer's style were in itself a thing of any value apart from all consideration of the thing expressed. Thus, of Shakespeare he says that "he wrote" (*wrote*—as if it were merely a case of words!) "both better and worse than any man."

The ancients, he insists, are to be our sole models. "All that is left us," he says, "is to recommend our productions by the imitation of the ancients; and it will be found true that, in every age, the highest character for sense and learning has been obtained by those who have been most indebted to them." "Among the moderns their success has been greatest who have most endeavoured to make these ancients their pattern." He cites Spenser and Tasso as those poets who show "the most considerable genius," and

does not here even mention Shakespeare. And in speaking of his own productions, he says, "If they have any merit it is to be attributed to some good old authors, whose works, as I had leisure to study, so, I hope, I have not wanted care to imitate."

In his "Essay on Criticism" he enforces in verse the same maxims—telling us to study nature, not in the original, but in the Greek poets. Thus, for instance, he says that Maro, *i.e.* Virgil, who for his "Georgics" drew inspiration from nature (and every poetic mind prefers the "Georgics" to the "Æneid"), afterwards, finding that "Homer and Nature were the same," fell back on Homer for his great epic instead of on nature. And Pope applauds.

The most successful of Pope's works is the "Rape of the Lock." The chief incident, the theft of a lock of hair from a lady, is in itself trivial enough, but the piece is like some delicately finished picture of the French "boudoir" school of painting—a scene from the drawing-room and boudoir of the period; and admirable as a representation of a certain phase of nature, such as it is. Nothing could excel the sparkling and polished phrases, or the keen pointed epigrams and satirical touches that are to be found in almost every line. It is the perfection of finish; and though the stone is paltry and valueless, we cannot but admire the art of the polisher.

As regards Pope's philosophical poems, they contain epigrammatic point, and many of the lines are

in request as quotations. The philosophy is poor, second-hand stuff, supplied to him mostly by Warburton. His "Essay on Man" inculcates the maxim that "the business of man is not to pry into God's secrets, but to study himself." This subject, "man," he treats (1) with relation to the universe, (2) as an individual, (3) with relation to society, (4) with regard to his object in life, happiness, which he thus addresses, "O happiness! our being's end and aim!" And as "Virtue alone is happiness below," he values virtue accordingly, as a valuable means for the attainment of this end. The conclusion of the whole matter is this: We are to rest content with what knowledge we can obtain by studying the external world and the workings of the mind. Though we may *hope*—even as the poor savage Indian dreams of happy hunting-grounds,—we can attain to no certainty in things beyond the senses.

In limiting certainty to the material world Pope of course implies a disbelief in, or an ignorance of, any faculty by which we may recognize an external perfection, and feel a certainty about the existence of the supersensuous. He, however, talks about God in set phrases, and was an orthodox Catholic, though it would have been interesting to have heard him give a consistent statement of his belief.

Happiness, submission, contentment with material knowledge, and with what seems to be nothing more than the workings of a blind Fate—such are his

doctrines. And it is not merely that he denies a loftier faculty, but he must necessarily, in order to account for everything, exalt the understanding above its sphere. All such philosophy naturally must do so.

The limits of the human understanding had been discussed by the philosopher John Locke, in an essay which was published two years after the birth of Pope, and which Pope devoured and assimilated when a mere boy. It was specially directed against the theory of innate ideas, which I spoke about in connection with Plato and Wordsworth. He states that the human mind is at the beginning of life devoid of any ideas ; that it is a *tabula rasa*, a blank page, to be filled up by experience. Therefore all knowledge, all certainty, is merely knowledge and certainty about, or at all events depending on, the material world. This is also Pope's belief. I shall hope to show later how this philosophy was opposed, and, I think, overthrown, at the end of last century and at the beginning of the present, by such men as Coleridge, Shelley, and Wordsworth ; and as the appreciation of their poems and their lives depends much on the recognition of the idea that pervades so much of their lives and their poems, I need not apologize for entering on this question here.

At present, however, before I come to Coleridge, I must trace the origin of the new movement with which he is associated, and spend a few moments also in considering a remarkable phenomenon,

one of great moment with respect to these new poets.

As regards the first of these—the origin of this new movement—it seems as if the human mind in its course of education from age to age develops ideas of which it has been incapable at earlier periods. I know of no passage in any ancient writer which even intimates that man is a part of—stands in any inner relationship to—nature, as conceived by the poets of the New Revival. It is true that we find in the ancients a deep love for and sympathy with nature, and may notice expressions such as “mother earth” and the like, which are also used by Shelley and Byron; but with the Greeks the idea was merely material or at the best Pantheistic. Though the powers of nature were personified in human forms (Pan perhaps representing Nature as a whole), we find no trace of a direct spiritual relationship between man and nature. Nor indeed did Dante or Shakespeare, any more than Pope, realize, as Wordsworth has taught us to realize, that—

“All are but parts of one stupendous whole,
Whose body Nature is, and God the soul.”

It was this idea, the relation of man to nature,—natural man, independent of caste and nation—not such as the Greeks conceived, nor as Shakespeare depicted, but *mankind*,—that now developed itself. And firstly, as was inevitable, it gave a far greater interest to nature itself, and also to the natural man

—not the drawing-room fop and gallant exquisite such as we find in Pope's writings, but to the common member of the human family.

As usual, we find harbingers of this new school—in like manner as we find the two Guidos, Cino of Pistora, Fra Guittone of Arezzo, and a few others who arose before Dante, heralding, as morning stars, the rise of the great sun of Italy. In 1643, more than twenty years before the publication of "*Paradise Lost*," Denham's poem on "*Cooper's Hill*" had appeared—perhaps the first of English poems almost purely descriptive of natural scenery: but both in "*Cooper's Hill*" and in Pope's "*Windsor Forest*," and other such early poems descriptive of nature, we find but few signs of a real love and reverence for nature, and none of that intense sympathy with the material world, which in Wordsworth reached such a depth of passionate longing that he would fain "surrender himself to the elements," and roam as a spirit, an equal among the mightiest energies of nature: whom the "sounding cataract haunted like a passion," who was ever filled with—

"The sense sublime

Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean, and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man."

The growth of this passion was gradual. At first we see it in merely an interest for natural scenery.

As an example of this revived interest in nature, may be taken the "Seasons" of Thomson, written about 1730, during the lifetime of Pope. This work consists mostly of mere description of country scenery during the four seasons of the year. As poetry it is worth little; but it shows distinctly the new interest that was being already taken in nature, even while Pope's boudoir scenes were enchanting the high-bred dandies of the town.

Then, as an example of transition from the classic to the natural school, take Gray. The melodious chime of his numbers is perfection itself. Many of his lines haunt one like the stately succession of chords in a heroic symphony; as those in his description of Greece:—

"Where each old poetic mountain
Inspiration breathed around;
Every shade and hallowed fountain
Murmured deep a solemn sound."

Or those majestic lines in which he compares his own poetic flight to that of the Theban eagle, Pindar:

"O lyre divine, what daring spirit
Wakes thee now? Though he inherit
Nor the pride nor ample pinion
That the Theban eagle bear,
Sailing with supreme dominion
Through the azure deep of air."

Nothing could be more perfect. Indeed Pindar's eagle could scarcely sail more securely and majestic-

ally, although Horace tells us that any one who dares to follow Pindar's flight will have his wings melted off by the sun and that he will drop ignominiously head-long into the sea—as happened to poor Icarus. This classical form in Gray is as true as that of Pope is false. Gray was penetrated with the true Greek spirit, and his odes are true creations in Greek form. In Gray, too, we see not only perfect form but an interest in nature. Who does not know his "Elegy," or his "Lines on Eton College"? The "Elegy" has been blamed for its want of logical sequence in parts, but what can be more beautiful than the poet's love for common nature and common natural feelings? All doubtless remember his description of the village churchyard (of Stoke Pogis) where "the rude forefathers of the village slept :"—

"The breezy call of incense-breathing morn,
The swallow twittering from the straw-built shed,
The cock's shrill clarion, or the echoing horn,
No more shall rouse them from their lowly bed.

"For them no more the blazing hearth shall burn,
Or busy housewife ply her evening care ;
No children run to lisp their sire's return,
Or climb his knees the envied kiss to share."

However classical this is in form (and the last stanza is almost a translation from the Roman poet Lucretius) it is also most natural. With what a disgust we turn from this fresh-scented scene beneath the rugged elms to the powdered perukes, satin shoes,

fans and boudoir furniture of Pope! How different, too, from the grand dandies and illustrious patrons of Pope is he with whose epitaph the "Elegy" concludes.

"Here rests his head upon the lap of earth
A youth to fortune and to fame unknown;
Fair Science frowned not on his humble birth,
And Melancholy marked him for her own."

As Mr. Stopford Brooke well remarks, the extended love for mankind—for natural man—was shown by the greater interest taken in foreign lands and foreign people. Thus we have the letters of Gray himself, written from abroad,—letters of great beauty in their natural descriptions. Oliver Goldsmith also gives us the "Traveller," besides the poem that one naturally classes with Gray's "Elegy," the "Deserted Village."

But the man who turned with deepest love to nature in her common aspects was a poet who was, perhaps, driven to the sweet consolation that the beauties of even such flat uninteresting scenery as that of the English fens could afford a spirit tormented—as was his—by the terrible demon of religious monomania. The notion that he had committed the unpardonable sin—a notion that, strangely enough, I not long ago saw produce intense agony of mind in the case of an African Christian native when in the delirium of sunstroke,—drove Cowper to thoughts at least of self-destruction, and this morbid

state of mind probably induced him to take refuge in the tender companionship of nature.

All his poems are pervaded with this natural scenery, and with the idea, so tersely expressed by him in the well-known line—

“God made the country, and man made the town.”

His simple unaffected style is as natural, though often to the reader as flat and uninteresting, as his scenery. His communion with nature was that of a simple lover of the country. Though he discusses theological and philosophical subjects, he is not the philosophical poet nor the poet of nature, that Wordsworth was. The following is a good example of his scenery :—

“Here Ouse, slow winding through a level plain
Of spacious meads with cattle sprinkled o’er,
Conducts the eye along his sinuous course,
Delighted. There, fast rooted in their bank,
Stand, never overlooked, our favourite elms,
That screen the herdsman’s solitary hut ;
While far beyond, and overthwart the stream,
That as with molten glass inlays the vale,
The sloping land recedes into the clouds,
Displaying on its varied side the grace
Of hedgerow beauties numberless, square tower,
Tall spire, from which the sound of cheerful bell
Just undulates upon the listening ear,
Groves, heaths, and smoking villages remote.”

It is for such passages as this that Cowper deserves to be remembered, more perhaps than for his minor poems, such as “Toll for the Brave,” “John Gilpin,”

and "Boadicea," which are far better known to the ordinary reader.

Enough has now been said to show that among the English poets of that period (a period that dates from about 1730, while Pope was still alive and in full possession of poetic supremacy) there was a decided movement in the direction of a love for common natural scenes,—a movement that found its fullest development in Keats, Wordsworth and others of that wonderful group of nature's poets.

But in these it was not merely, as in Cowper, a love for country scenery. The relation of man to nature—to the universe—when received by philosophic minds led to the consideration of the rights of man independent of custom and traditional law, his fellowship with nature and his common brotherhood. Such thoughts as these raised the cry for liberty, for the overthrow of despotisms, for equality and fraternity.

Of the two great political outcomes of this idea, the declaration of independence in America and the French Revolution, the second here claims our attention on account of the attitude assumed towards it by three at least of the poets whose lives and poems I wish to discuss—namely Coleridge, Shelley, and Wordsworth. Moreover the question is of deep interest for us nowadays, when assassination and rebellion would forsooth claim descent from the noble, though mistaken, ideal politics of philosophers and poets.

To explain this attitude it will be necessary to consider for a few moments the character of this political phenomenon, and the nature of civil government.

Government is rightly stated by Hooker, Locke, and others, to have had its origin in "primary contract." By virtue of this contract powers are delegated by a nation's "free and deliberate assent" to a single man or a body of men.

Now in what cases is such a contract practicable?

In these matters there exists an apparent analogy between the "little world" of individual life and the "great world" of national life. As individuals we make a compact with our understanding for the conduct of by far the greater part of our practical life in accordance with rules and habits which we have adopted as constitutional. By this compact we save ourselves an infinitude of trouble. We no longer feel it necessary to test the possibility or advisability of many acts, as a child must while it is yet collating its experiences. And in all matters of external importance (*τὰ μὴ ἐφ' ἡμῶν*) we can, and often gladly do, delegate power to others; as, for instance, in matters of business, health, and the like. But delegation of the moral sense is impossible. In all acts involving morality we have to appeal to our own inmost sense of right and wrong.

This holds also in the case of a nation. Its moral sense cannot be delegated.

Now the three poets whom I have mentioned, and

many other noble-minded men, would enthrone *man* in political power; and by *man* they understood the highest human faculty, the moral sense, as some would call it, or the "Reason" as Coleridge termed it.

The mistake lies in this—that a nation cannot make any contract by which its moral sense is delegated into the hands of representatives. It must retain the right of expression in all such cases. Such I believe to be the error which then misled, and in our own days still misleads, much lofty enthusiasm.

By the actual instigators and authors of the French Revolution, *man* was likewise enthroned in political power. But their conception of man was widely different. We have seen that in the writings of Locke and his followers (to which the Revolution owed much) the attainment of certainty in the supersensuous, that is of ideal truth, was denied, and understanding was exalted as our highest faculty. French philosophism enthroned man under the name of Reason (what Coleridge calls Understanding), and the result was inevitable. Carlyle speaks in quaint but forcible words of "those decadent ages in which no Ideal either grows or blossoms, when belief and loyalty have passed away and only the cant and false echo of them remains:" and he adds, "Remark how from amid the wrecks and dust of this universal Decay new Powers are fashioning themselves, adapted to the new time and its destinies. . . . French Philosophism has arisen, in which little word how much do

we include ! Here, indeed, lies properly the cardinal symptom of the whole widespread malady. Faith is gone out : Scepticism is come in." This scepticism is only negative and destructive, can only sweep away what is false, can only contradict a lie. "Philosophism only knows that a lie cannot be believed. Her other belief is mainly that in spiritual supersensual matters no belief is possible. Unhappy ! . . . the lie with its contradiction once swept away, what will remain ? The five unsatiated senses will remain . . . the whole *dæmonic* nature of man will remain—hurled forth to rage blindly without rule or rein : savage itself, yet with all the tools and weapons of civilization : a spectacle new in History."

As purely merely rational beings we could conduct our lives perfectly well by aid of understanding. Expediency would teach us what was best ; science would supply our needs ; we should be fit citizens of a universal republic, each citizen governing himself and helping to govern the state by the understanding that infallibly directed him to what was universally expedient. But it is not so. We are not merely rational beings. We are not passionless : and without the help of the moral sense understanding is powerless against passion—is its natural slave. If, therefore, we depend on understanding, we shall find it directing us, not to what is universally expedient (that law universal which is the highest conception of even such philosophy as Kant's), but to what is expedient for

our individual interests : for in spite of all theories as to "the happiness of the greatest member" the one end of all philosophy founded solely on the Understanding must ever remain the happiness of Self.

Turning to facts, let us study the matter first in the microcosm of a single man ; and let us take a man whose writings, perhaps more even than the destructive genius of Voltaire, brought about the French Revolution of 1789,—I mean Rousseau. Rousseau was one of the first of those who (as the English poets whom I have mentioned, such as Thomson and Cowper) turned from the artificiality and gross atmosphere of town and court life to nature. Disgusted with the state of things that existed at the French court of Louis Quatorze and in French society, he rushed like an impulsive Frenchman to the other extreme. Society, he said, was false to the core. Let us go to nature. Let us cast aside, not only perukes and powder, but shoes and coats and everything ; let us become the "noble naked savage ;" retreat to the forests ; live upon berries : as nature evidently intended man to do. As Voltaire remarked, Rousseau's eloquent appeal almost makes one wish to "go upon all-fours."

Then, for morals : we are to listen to the dictates of the heart. Sensibility is to be our guide. How this same sensibility, this natural heart, misled Rousseau himself, is only too evident from his "Confessions," and from the beautiful but over-impassioned

story of love to be found in his "Nouvelle Héloïse." Those who have visited the Lake of Geneva will doubtless remember Clarens, where the "self-torturing sophist, wild Rousseau, first drew the breath that made him wretched;" and (hardly second to the actual scene) the description of it given by Byron in his "Childe Harold"—that "populous solitude of bees and birds," where the very trees take root in love, and where the snows and glaciers have caught the rose-tints of passion.

Rousseau practised, to some extent, his own theories. He left off wearing a sword and white stockings; took to a square wig instead of a pigtail; sold his watch, exclaiming, "Thank heaven, I shall never again want to know what time it is."

As regards politics, he published an essay on the "Social Contract"—a work that had a great influence on the development of the Revolution.

How far his guide, Sensibility, was to be trusted may be also learnt from the fact that, though he expressly says that no man for any reason can be absolved from being himself the educator of his own children, yet, when it came to practice, he sent his five children, whose mother was his maidservant, to a foundling hospital.

Here we see the natural man exalted to power under the name of Sensibility, and the consequent usurpation of power by the Passions.

It was the same with the Revolution itself. It

is true that the same terms were not used. In this case "Reason" (so-called) was enthroned in political power, and deified also for religious worship. But this "Reason" was incapable of coping in its own strength with passion. It seems as if the instigators of this movement were aware that their theory wanted modification, for you will find that, while they allowed what they called universal franchise, they took care to exclude the young, as wanting a sufficient amount of "reason," and *women*, as being too dependent to be able to exercise their reason satisfactorily—a theory that would hardly be accepted by many nowadays.

If therefore the theory of the enthronement of human nature, however we define that nature, be false, leading in one case to inevitable failure and in the other to the inevitable triumph of passion, what theory can we accept?

In the first place I cannot but believe that, just as is the case with the individual man, supreme arbitrament in cases of morality must be allowed to the *moral sense* of a nation, in whatever way it may express itself. Secondly, that the political affairs of a state should be conducted on principles of general expediency, and to this sphere the power of the delegates of a nation should be confined. It is impossible to obtain in externals perfect liberty, equality, and fraternity. True that in our *real*, not our political, life we (whether or not politicians) should aim at these things, for our sense of perfection tells us that they are to be aimed at:

but as regards the working of a state, is not legislation merely a vast accumulation of expedients? The law must necessarily judge a *crime* in itself—it must allow much which is no less criminal in its sinfulness (I need scarcely name the one great instance of this), but which does not, or in so far as it does not, militate against society and the public weal. It cannot be ideal. Plato imagined an ideal republic—but he confesses that it must be peopled with philosophers, not with common mortals. He of all men would have denounced its realization after the manner of the French Republic. Therefore it seems to me reasonable to hold that, *if we allow the free expression of the instinctive moral feeling of the nation* in all questions involving morality (and in these alone “*vox populi est vox Dei*”), the government of a state is best effected by choosing some simple method—whether under the guise of monarchy, republicanism, or what not—that shall conduct affairs with regard to *general* expediency, thus obviating the danger of passions tending to individual interests, exactly as our understanding conducts the affairs of our material life, not in the interest of head or belly or any single member, but in the interest of the whole. And consequently, as government is merely a practical science, poets and philosophers should not trouble themselves about it, but should leave it to men of practical talent, confining themselves to exerting all their influence on the national moral sense which must ever remain the only

true and the supreme arbiter in matters of highest importance.

This political parenthesis (with which doubtless some will strongly disagree) I have thought necessary for the explanation of the political opinions of the poets whom we are now approaching.

In them we find a raving for liberty. So far, so good. But they mistook the function of the moral sense of man, for which they demanded this liberty. They wished to seat it in the throne of political power; and they hailed with enthusiasm the downfall of monarchism in France and the coronation of Man. Too much faith did they—with their intense belief in the loftier tendencies of the human mind—place in the new king, who, led by passion, was soon to revel in human blood and reign in terror.

Slowly and reluctantly such men as Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Shelley turned from this scene of horror; they turned, and found consolation in nature itself.

The later philosophical writings of Coleridge are in direct antagonism to this exaltation of what he calls the Understanding. He combats for a sense of unseen truth (termed by him "Reason"), and for certainty in an unseen world. Probably his ideas were, to some extent, in their first origin due to the German school of thought, with which he became intimate. But his development of these ideas is entirely original; and though in reading

his writings nowadays one finds nothing novel, one must remember that in his day the philosophy of Hobbes, Locke, Hume, and others, to say nothing of the terribly rational theology of Paley (which is still taught at our Universities)—that these doctrines, denying, implicitly at least, a certainty beyond that of our senses, were almost universally accepted.

The influence of Coleridge has so permeated the whole atmosphere of thought, that we now accept as commonplaces many of the ideas which he was the first to formally promulgate in England.

My intention is now to consider with some fullness the life and writings—especially the poetical writings—of Coleridge ; and I shall then speak of four other poets of the new natural school, namely, Wordsworth, Byron, Keats, and Shelley.

CHAPTER VI.

COLERIDGE.

WHEN we rise from a study of the life and works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge—I do not mean so much of a single poem or of a single period of his life, but a general survey of the whole subject—probably in most of us the predominant feeling is one of disappointment at what may seem a picture of splendid talents unused or even abused, and of a wasted life. Possibly to some extent our estimate is true, and we shall see what grounds we have for this belief when we have considered the life and poems of this poetic philosopher—for such we may justly name him in contradistinction to the philosophic poet Wordsworth.

However, I conceive that in this as in many other cases we ground our estimate too much on substantial results. We are not easily persuaded that a mind such as that of Coleridge can be of much value, because it is so apt to fly off into infinite space rather than to complete the entire orbit—leaving us a fragment of an arc rather than the whole perfection of a figure.

But mathematicians will tell us that besides the circle, and the ellipse (the arcs of which have a returning tendency and therefore describe a bounded figure "teretem atque rotundam," round and complete), there is also the hyperbola rushing off into infinite space; and astronomers will illustrate such curves from the motions of the constant planets moving in their elliptic orbs, and of the comet,—for, unless I am mistaken, some comets do so—flaring for a brief space across our sky and then plunging away from our sight, never again to return. Of this nature are some minds; and we are very apt to underrate their value.

It is, I think, at least probable that such men as Coleridge have their special function, and that a very important one, though not one which can be easily estimated or defined. The eccentric curve cannot bound any material object—for such purposes it is useless; and, losing our material result, we lament. "What a waste of talent!" we say: "What vague profitless transcendentalism!"

This quality of Coleridge is to be seen in all he did, in all he wrote, and in all he said. De Quincey, with his melodious majesty of language, gives us his explanation. He asserts that it is falsely stated that Coleridge allowed his thoughts to rush off (like our comet) into infinite space; it was rather that the immense orbit described by his ideas, even in ordinary conversation, was beyond the power of his listeners to follow; but, he argues, Coleridge always did think

out his points in logical sequence. But why endeavour to express this, when this master of words has expressed it for us?

"To many people," says De Quincey, "Coleridge seemed to wander: and he seemed then to wander the most when . . . the compass and huge circuit by which his illustrations moved travelled furthest into remote regions, before they began to revolve. Long before this coming round commenced, most people had lost him, and naturally enough supposed that he had lost *himself*. They continued to admire the separate beauty of the thoughts, but did not see their relation to the dominant theme. However, I can assert from my long and intimate knowledge of Coleridge's mind, that logic the most severe was as inalienable from his modes of thought as grammar was from his language."

With all due deference to De Quincey's opinion, founded as it was on this long and intimate knowledge of the poet's mind, I should beg to differ from him. I feel thoroughly convinced that, though Coleridge may not have lost *himself*, though his ideas were connected and proceeded on true analogies, yet that the arc of his thoughts often had *no* returning tendency—that these never did "begin to revolve" again towards their starting place, but went off into eternity of space. And this—which is about the same thing as saying that he argued from the sensible to the unseen, that he had an eminently

ideal, if a sadly unpractical mind—is to be seen in his life and poems, as well as in his conversation. It is of this life and these poems that I wish especially to speak: but before entering upon the relation of facts in connection with this subject, I wished to bring forward this theory which seems to me to make some of the facts more intelligible.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge was born on the 21st of October, 1772, about two and a half years after the birth of Wordsworth. His birthplace was the vicarage of Ottery St. Mary's, in Devonshire.

That the poet, the youngest of ten children, inherited certain traits of character from his father, the Rev. John Coleridge, head master of the Grammar School and afterwards vicar of the parish of Ottery St. Mary's, is apparent from the fact that, like the son, the father was deeply devoted to study and book-learning, and was so disregarding of the common events and interests of life that he went by the name of the "absent man." His analysing tendency may be seen by the fact, which his biographers relate, that he was not satisfied with the usual name which Julius Cæsar gave to the case in Latin that (as schoolboys are taught) expresses "from, by, or how"—*i.e.* the ablative; but taught his pupils to call it the "Quale-quare-quidditive," which means what we might express by the "how, why, and what" case.

Another fact related illustrates his absence of

mind. It is said that once his wife, when packing his portmanteau for a journey, put in five shirts, and told him to put on a clean one every day. The good man did as he was bid ; put a clean one on every day, but forgot to take off the other, and arrived at home with all five on his back.

The boyhood of the young poet was subjected to the baleful influence of a tyrannizing schoolmaster—Dr. Bowyer, head master of Christ's Hospital. The description that Charles Lamb gives of this school life makes one wonder how any one, far less one with the delicate sensibilities and the original mind of Coleridge, could have survived the daily and hourly torment of the "drilled dull lesson forced down word by word," the brutal cuffs and floggings and Latin syntax, which were then considered necessary for the education of a gentleman. Indeed, though in after life he praised his teacher, how intolerable such things became to Coleridge by the time that he was fifteen years of age is apparent from the fact that he endeavoured to apprentice himself to a shoemaker in order to get rid of school and schoolmasters. It was during this school life that he first contracted the tendency to rheumatism, brought on by a chill caught after swimming across the New River in his clothes. I mention this because, as we shall see, these bodily pains induced a subsequent state of mental depression which is visible in his later poems, and for relief from which he was led to a habit that increased his mental misery tenfold.

In 1791, Coleridge went to Jesus College, Cambridge. His classical knowledge gained him some distinction, but his mind, as was the case with other poets such as Wordsworth, Byron, and Shelley, was not one to bear academical fruit. While at Cambridge he studied and became an ardent disciple of the philosopher Hartley, who had been a member of the same college, and whose name afterwards Coleridge bestowed on his firstborn son, Hartley Coleridge. Hartley's philosophy was somewhat of the same character as that of Locke. He founded all knowledge on "association ;" that is, on the conception of things under certain conditions, such as those of space, time, and form. That is to say, he denied that we can know anything by *itself*—as a true existence in itself. We shall see how in later days Coleridge utterly rejected this doctrine. At Cambridge, also, he adopted the form of Unitarian belief.

The ill repute of his opinions and certain money difficulties now induced him to take a reckless step. With characteristic impulsiveness, in a fit of despondency, he left the university, and wandered as a penniless vagabond about the streets of London—having distributed the last of his money to his fellow "misérables" in the region of Chancery Lane. Then came a step still more regardless of consequences. He enlisted as a private in the Light Dragoons, taking the name of Comberbach, which he caught sight of over a shop door

when the recruiting sergeant asked him his name—an appellation which he says his horse fully appreciated.

This military episode was, however, of short duration. After about four months' service, during which he became the favourite of the tap-room (where, amidst the clink of pewter pots and the coarse jokes of his fellow-dragoons, he composed on Christmas Eve one of his most philosophic poems, "Religious Musings")—he betrayed himself by writing a sentence in Latin on the wall of the stable. The words were "*Eheu quam infortunii miserrimum est fuisse felicem*,"—"Alas how much the worst part of misfortune it is to have once been happy:" a sentiment first expressed by Boethius, I think, and put into the mouth of Francesca da Rimini by Dante. The poetical dragoon was bought out by his friends and sent back to the university—which, however, he soon left again, without a degree.

This was followed by what is called his "Bristol period," a space of about three years, from 1794 to 1797, during which, among other attempts to realize his dreams of liberty, he, together with the poet Southey, whose acquaintance he had made on a visit to Oxford, set on foot a wild scheme for organizing an ideal republic on the banks of the Susquehanna in America. In theory it was most charming. The men were to attend to the agriculture and cattle, which were to supply all the needs of the settlement,

and the women to perform the household duties ; and there was to be plenty of leisure for recreation and intellectual edification. Unfortunately, when the time came, the enthusiastic emigrants could not scrape together enough money to pay their passage, and the scheme that was to begin the new era of Pantisocracy fell to the ground.

As a reaction, I suppose, from this dream of liberty, came Coleridge's marriage with Sara Fricker, whose sister Edith became the wife of Southey.

Reduced as a family man to the necessity of gaining a livelihood, Coleridge gave political lectures and started a newspaper, the *Watchman*. Flaming hand-bills, stating that "Knowledge is power," and the eloquent rhapsodies of the poet-editor, who canvassed the country for subscribers, floated the speculation. But soon Coleridge's unpractical nature wrought its ruin. The publication was irregular ; the politics were too violent ; the religious sentiments too intolerant. After a life of ten numbers, the *Watchman* died a natural death.

In his paper, and also in his lectures, he vehemently attacked the policy then being pursued by Pitt. His opinions on this subject may be seen in a piece called "Fire, Famine, and Slaughter," wherein he represents three fiendish shapes recounting their ravages, and attributing all to the orders of one man, whose name contains four letters. This was written in 1796. Though very inferior to his later productions, it

certainly shows some of Coleridge's characteristic power in weird and supernatural descriptions.

During this "Bristol period" the poet used to preach a good deal to Unitarian congregations. His violent language and hyperbolical line of thought seem to have been very often little appreciated; and I have no doubt that when speaking on subjects that require form and definition Coleridge was a most unsatisfactory preacher. But, if we are to believe Hazlitt, when he was engaged on a subject in which daring flights of imagination and rhetoric were admissible, the impression that he made was extraordinary. Indeed that is the word which best describes the man—extraordinary. If I remember right, Wordsworth describes him as the "only wonderful man" he had ever met. Hazlitt too, says, "He is the only person I ever knew who answered to the idea of a man of genius. He is the only person from whom I ever *learned* anything." His extraordinary conversational, or rather declamatory, powers have been already mentioned. "He talked on for ever," says Hazlitt, "and you wished him to talk on for ever. His thoughts did not seem to come with labour and effort, but as if borne on the gusts of genius, and as if the wings of imagination lifted him off his feet." He himself more than once confesses that directly he took a pen to write down his thoughts, his expression became laboured and a thing of difficulty, whereas in speaking he followed up with

natural ease the most subtle analogies and the profoundest lines of reasoning.

During his sojourn at Bristol he published a few poems. "Religious Musings" I have already mentioned as having been composed in the tap-room at Reading, on Christmas Eve, 1794. In the same year we have an historical and political drama, "The Fall of Robespierre." Also two political odes to "The Departing Year" (1796) and to "France" (1797, February).

"One little entry," says Professor Shairp, "in a letter of November, 1796—his last year at Bristol,—is sadly memorable as the first appearance of

‘The little rift within the lute
That soon will make the music mute.’”

The entry is to the effect that, having suffered much from neuralgic pains, he "took sixty or seventy drops of laudanum, and stopped the Cerberus."

The next year he removed to the village of Nether Stowey in Somersetshire, near the Quantock Hills. Here he was joined by Wordsworth and his sister, and we see the political polemical element in his life and poems henceforth fading away before a new-born love. Within the space of this *one* year of 1798, or nearly so, Coleridge wrote all the poems that have made him famous—the "Ancient Mariner," the first part of "Christabel," "Genevieve," "Kubla Khan," and the lines to Wordsworth on hearing him

read the "Prelude." It is said that the two poets wished to take a walking tour together among the Quantock Hills, and in order to raise the £5 necessary to cover their expenses, decided on composing some poetry for a magazine. Coleridge took the general idea of the "Ancient Mariner" from a dream that some friend had related to him (he was fond of dreamland poetry; "Kubla Khan," for instance, is a poem entirely composed during a dream); Wordsworth suggested the introduction of the albatross,* and threw in a few lines here and there. The success of this idea induced the two poets to publish their poems in a joint volume instead of a magazine, and the first volume of the well-known "Lyrical Ballads" was brought out in 1798. The volume begins with the "Rime of the Ancient Mariner" and ends with Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey."

Had Coleridge continued under the influence of nature and nature's poet, he might have been better known as a poet and less as a philosopher. But "wisest Fate said, No." Having had a small income settled on him by the celebrated Mr. Wedgewood, Coleridge went to Germany, and passed fourteen months there (mostly at Göttingen), listening to lectures, and talking metaphysics with German professors. Wordsworth, who accompanied him to Germany, settled at Goslar, and there—regardless of the new philosophy with which Germany was at that

* The story was originally related by the navigator Shelvocke.

time re-echoing—composed some of his most characteristically English poems.

To enter here upon the question of this new philosophy and the doctrines of Kant would be impossible. It is enough to state that Coleridge's mind seems to have received with rapture the doctrine—so strangely new then to Englishmen, except perhaps in a limited religious sense—that we have not only an intellect or understanding, but a higher faculty. This faculty in his writings he calls Reason, and in reading his "Aids to Reflection" and other of his philosophical productions, it is necessary to accept the word Reason in this higher sense.

On his return from Germany in the autumn of 1799, he set to work on the translation of Schiller's "Wallenstein," which he is said to have completed in three weeks.

Soon after this, in 1800, Coleridge settled at Keswick. Southey, his brother-in-law, shortly after joined him, and the two families shared "Greta Hall," whence they paid frequent visits to Grasmere, where Wordsworth was living. During the first year of his residence at Keswick (as he tells us in the preface to the poem) Coleridge composed the second part of "Christabel."

At this time he was only twenty-eight years of age. It might have been expected that he would yet write much, and what should even surpass his "Ancient Mariner," and "Christabel." But from this

time all his poetic faculties seem to have been dimmed, and his meditations clothed in some dark despondency. An "Ode to Dejection," the "Pains of Sleep," "Youth and Age,"—such are the significant titles of some of the pieces written during the later poetic period of his life. It cannot be doubted that his health suffered very severely, both from his rheumatic attacks, aggravated doubtless by the damp climate of Cumberland, and also from the anodyne, opium, with which he sought to allay those pains, and the delights of which in time seem to have enslaved him completely. Those who have read De Quincey's extraordinary description of the joys and torments of an opium-eater will be able to understand the fatal power that this drug exercised over the poet. A short visit to Malta (where he was secretary to the governor, Sir Alexander Ball) and to Rome seems to have given him but little relief. There is a story that Napoleon had issued a warrant for his apprehension on account of his political articles in a London newspaper (the *Morning Post*), and that he was obliged to embark on an American ship, and, with the assistance of the Pope, to fly from the country; moreover, that, being chased by a French frigate, the captain compelled Coleridge to throw overboard all his papers, among which were valuable notes on his travels.

The next thirty years of Coleridge's life I shall not attempt to trace in detail. His poetic com-

position had come to an almost entire standstill. Wandering about restlessly from place to place, now at Keswick with his family, now with Wordsworth at Grasmere, now lecturing in London, leading what Professor Shairp well calls a "homeless aimless wasted" existence, he devoted most of his attention to philosophical and theological problems. The *Friend*, a weekly publication of moral essays, was his first considerable prose work. In it we see plainly indications of the complete change that had come over the disciple of Hartley. He also had accepted a more *formal* creed in religious matters—a natural result of the change that his philosophical views had experienced.

In the first period of his intellectual life he had been ignorant of the existence of a higher spiritual faculty; or, rather, he had never consciously formulated the belief to himself. In this state of mind he had vigorously applauded in the French Revolution, the triumph (as he supposed) of natural liberty.

He had also as vigorously applauded natural as *versus* revealed religion. But having discovered, as he thought, the twofold nature of man, he no longer confused * the functions of the two faculties; he

* I am aware that Coleridge did not strictly abide by the Kantian definitions of "Vernunft," and "Verstand," and also that he perhaps wrongly extended the domain of the former so as to include the facts which he considered inseparable from the Christian revelation, an act which Carlyle calls an intellectual "hocus-pocus." But I do not profess to give a full analysis of his phases of belief.

allowed the lower, which he called understanding, its proper function, both in state politics and in religion. He accepted *form* as indispensable. But that he idolized form is utterly untrue. There is no religious writer who is more spiritual in his teachings than Coleridge, none who wages such a war against those who, as Paley, would give us a rational foundation for our belief. "Evidences of Christianity!" he used to exclaim; "I am weary of the word: make a man *feel the want* of it!"

Meanwhile opium had gained the grip of a fiend on him. It seemed likely that it would soon drag him face to face with death himself. With the energy of despair—and what a struggle it must have been we can scarcely conceive—he tore himself free. He placed himself under the care of a physician, Mr. Gilman, at Highgate, taking up his abode in the same house; and there he passed a great deal of the remainder of his life, and there, in 1834, he died.

During these last eighteen years of a life, shattered indeed by the fatal indulgence, but prolonged by this act of self-mastery, Coleridge wrote the philosophical and theological books of which the best known is his "Aids to Reflection." These works have secured him a high place among original thinkers, and have had an extraordinary influence in giving that special tone to English thought which is even now in the general atmosphere, though lately it has been somewhat neutralized by the revival under new names of old

materialistic theories—as old at least as Lucretius or even his master Democritus.

One more touch may put a little life into this picture of Coleridge. Miss Wordsworth gives us an inventory of his features and his general appearance: "Thin and pale; the lower part of the face not good: wide mouth; thick lips; not very good teeth; longish, loose, half curling, rough, black hair." Her brother describes him more poetically; firstly, when animated,—

"The rapt one of the godlike forehead,
The heaven-eyed creature"—

And in repose,—

"A noticeable man with large grey eyes,
And a pale face that seemed undoubtedly
As if a blooming face it ought to be;
Heavy his low-hung lip did oft appear
Depressed by weight of brooding fantasy;
Profound his forehead was, though not severe."

We have now finished with the man and his life, and I shall turn to his poems, taking them in the order in which I have already mentioned them.

"Religious Musings" is written in blank and rather heavy verse. As natural in a poem written on Christmas Eve, it begins with allusions to the birth and person of Christ. But it soon slides into political tirades. The war and the French Revolution are treated, and a prophecy of a millennium and universal redemption ends the piece. The question of

universal brotherhood and liberty, as well as that of man's relation to nature (which is expressed in words very similar to those of Pope), and also the poet's theological idea of the great Father of all, are seen in close connection in the following passage.

"'Tis the sublime of man,
Our noontide majesty to know ourselves
Parts and proportions of one wondrous whole.
This fraternizes man, this constitutes
Our charities and bearings. But 'tis God
Diffused through all, that doth make all one whole ;
This the worst superstition, him except
Aught to desire, supreme reality."

His description of the origin of property, with good and evil in its train, is worth reading. Its vehemence would almost satisfy a modern Communist. One must, however, remember that it was written by a penniless dragoon who had scarcely taken reasonable care of his own property, and was in a fit state of mind to rave against those who had.

The "Ode to France," written, as I have stated, just before Coleridge left Bristol, contains some very beautiful passages on the subject of liberty. Thus it begins :—

"Ye clouds, that far above me float and pause,
Whose pathless march no mortal may control ;
Ye ocean waves that, wheresoe'er ye roll,
Yield homage only to eternal laws,
Ye woods, that listen to the night-birds' singing,
Midway the steep and perilous slope reclined,

Save when your own imperious branches swinging
Have made a solemn music of the wind ;—

* * * * *

O ye loud waves, and O ye forests high,
And O ye clouds that far above me soared,
Thou rising sun, thou blue rejoicing sky,
Yea, everything that is and will be free,
Bear witness for me, whereso'er ye be,
With what deep worship I have still adored
The spirit of divinest liberty."

Of the poems written during his intercourse with Wordsworth at Nether Stowey may be mentioned "Genevieve," a very beautiful story of love, bearing in it that lofty and yet tender tone which was natural to Coleridge, and the lines in which he describes Wordsworth reading to him the first rough copy of the "Prelude" (which the author tells us was begun in 1799) :—

"An Orphic song indeed,
A song divine of high and passionate thoughts,
To their own music chanted."

"Kubla Khan" was also a product of this period. He affirms that it was composed in a dream, and the dreamland magnificence of this fragment would almost allow us to believe what he says.

I have said how the story of the "Ancient Mariner" originated. In a Latin quotation that he prefixed to the poem the notion is discussed whether there may not be spiritual and unseen beings around us in the world, and the contemplation of such images by our mind is recommended as likely to lift us from the

petty minutiae of everyday life. The tendency of Coleridge's mind was ever towards infinity and the supernatural ; and here we find him in his element. The unearthly weirdness and ghastly horrors of the poem make one's flesh creep. It is not that it is a mere sensational picture, a mere accumulation of horrors. We are in a ghostly world. The thing is a reality to us, as real as Dante's "Inferno" itself, and it has a meaning. We do not reason about it, and say, "Impossible ;" rather, with the wedding guest we tremblingly exclaim,—

" I fear thee, ancient mariner,
I fear thy skinny hand."

The *moral* of the poem is partly disclosed and stated in words by the poet, but there is more to be learned from it than can be defined in words. You will notice that the idea, as actually stated by the poet, "to love all things both great and small" because "the dear God who loveth us, He made and loveth"—is an outcome of that spirit that I spoke of as characteristic of the new Revival.

With regard to "Christabel"—the poem of Coleridge's which one naturally classes with the "Ancient Mariner"—still less can be said of its definable meaning. Indeed it is unsatisfactorily vague—for some of us at least. We should like to know what the poet really intended it to signify.

Now I fancy we shall find a clue to direct us aright in what Coleridge himself says in his "Literary

Biography." Speaking of the "Lyrical Ballads" and the different subjects and modes of treatment adopted by himself and Wordsworth, he says, "It was agreed that my endeavours should be directed to persons and characters supernatural, or at least romantic; yet so as to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment which constitutes poetic faith. . . . With this view I wrote the 'Ancient Mariner,' and was preparing, among other poems, the 'Dark Ladie,'" (which, by the way, is a mere fragment, to be found among his "Sibylline Leaves"), "and the 'Christabel,' in which I should have more nearly realized my ideal than I had done in my first attempt."

In "Christabel" I think we can recognize representations of various senses and faculties of human nature. Christabel is the daughter of Sir Leoline. Her mother is dead, but her spirit still watches and guards her daughter. At dead of night the maiden steals out to a wood to pray for her absent lover. Here she finds a lovely woman, "richly clad, and beautiful exceedingly," who tells her how five warriors had carried her off from her home, and had deserted her in the wood. Christabel takes this *Geraldine* back with her to her bedroom. Here *Geraldine* sinks to the floor in weariness: raves wildly, as if she saw a vision, crying out,—

“ Off, wandering mother ! peak and pine !
I have the power to make thee flee,
... This hour is mine.”

She is refreshed by wine that was made by Christabel's mother. Then Christabel undresses and lies down “in her loveliness :” but looking up soon from the bed sees the unclothed body of Geraldine—“a sight to dream of, not to tell,” an old withered corpse-like horror. Geraldine is filled with dismay at being perceived, but recovers herself, and lying down beside Christabel presses her to her bosom, and mutters spells over her, which have the effect of producing horrible dreams. But these pass, and a calm sleep falls on her. She is awakened by the chiming bells, and fancies that all she has seen must have been illusion beholding Geraldine so fair and sweet again. The two descend into the hall, and Sir Leoline discovers that Geraldine's father, Sir Roland de Vaux is an old friend of his youth with whom he had quarrelled. He embraces her—at which moment the vision of the hag revives in Christabel's mind ; but the thought of her dead mother comforts her as she lifts her eyes in prayer. Sir Leoline bids his Bard go to Sir Roland and acquaint him with the safety of his daughter. The Bard begs to be excused on account of a dream, in which he had seen a snake killing a dove. The Baron smiles disdainfully at the Bard, and again kisses Geraldine ; whereupon Christabel again sees her disenchanted,

this time with small snaky eyes glancing askance at her,—and not only sees her, but through some “forced unconscious sympathy” she is obliged herself to assume for a moment that “look of dull and treacherous hate.” But, with an unuttered prayer, she falls at her father’s feet and begs him by her mother’s soul to send the woman away from her. He is enraged at what he fancies is a freak of feminine jealousy, and rejecting the better thoughts that the memory of his dead wife suggest to him, orders the Bard forthwith to set out on his journey.

Here the story of “Christabel” suddenly terminates, only two of the five intended parts having been written. There is a conclusion to the second part, which I will speak of later.

Now, to me, the meaning of this story, put into a different form, is somewhat as follows.

Christabel is our human nature in its purest and fairest form. She derives her *spiritual* existence from her sainted mother, who, though in heaven, watches over her, will hear the bells on her wedding-day, and protects her mind from all baleful influences. Notice, in passing, that this spiritual presence is perhaps recognized even by the animal creation in the shape of the faithful old mastiff:—

“Some say he sees my lady’s shroud.”

Sir Leoline is the source of her lower fleshly life, the dull unspiritual sensuous nature, unaffected by the

influence of the supernatural, unconscious of the true nature of Geraldine. Geraldine is vice, in a lovely and glittering exterior. She is found by Christabel when thinking of her absent lover. Her father is one who was dear to Sir Leoline, the fleshly nature, in his youth. She has been brought to Christabel by five warriors, namely the five senses. As Geraldine passes towards the bedchamber the animal creation, even when asleep—nay, even lifeless nature—recognizes her :—

“ Outside her kennel the mastiff old
Lay fast asleep in the moonshine cold ;
The mastiff old did not awake,
Yet she an angry moan did make. . . .
They passed the hall, that echoes still
Pass as lightly as you will.
The brands were flat, the brands were dying,
Amid their own white ashes lying ;
But when the lady passed, there came
A tongue of light, a fit of flame.”

The vision that Geraldine sees in the bedchamber is that of the guardian mother, which appears when Christabel exclaims—

“ O mother dear, that thou wert here ! ”

In the terrible sight of Geraldine's withered body, the innocent maiden recognizes the foulness of the sin which her mind has harboured. The muttered spells and evil dreams are the suggestions of this sin that has found entrance into her mind. But

the sinfulness of sin disappears with the consciousness of it, and she finds Geraldine next morning fair to her innocent mind.

The Baron recognizing Geraldine as the daughter of his once-loved friend,—pleasant memories of past sin filling his old mind, which has never lost the marks of “what once has been,”—and, good easy man, seeing nothing but silly sensitiveness in his pure daughter’s horror of evil passions, despatches the Bard to acquaint his quondam friend of what has happened, and to renew their friendship ; making use, that is, of the excitements of æsthetic pleasures, such as music and all art may afford to those who abuse them, for the purpose of reviving his acquaintance with old and pleasant sins. Art, in the person of the Bard, refuses this hateful mission, and would fain deter the old sensualist by a dream—an imaginative picture in which evil is represented in his true form, as a serpent. But the fleshly is too strong for the spiritual, the “Baron rich” too powerful for the poor Bard, and, in spite of his daughter’s piteous entreaties “by the soul of her sainted mother,” and in spite of memories that even his own fleshly organism of a brain brings to him, which only “swelled his rage and pain, and did but work confusion there,” he has his way.

I don’t know if this seems all nonsense to others—I would not lay much stress on it, even for myself ; but these thoughts have occurred to me, and such

as they are I have given them. When, however, I next read *Christabel* I shall try to forget them all, and look upon the poem as a reality and not an allegory.

One point more. I often used to wonder what was meant by the conclusion, and could see no connection between it and the rest of the poem. But I think that now I see some, and this has also thrown light on certain lines in the first part, the meaning of which was a puzzle to me before. The lines are especially those in which he describes (1) the dream, (2) the unconscious sympathy which made *Christabel* assume the very look of hateful sin that she saw in *Geraldine*.

First let me state what I think is the idea, and then I will quote the lines. I said that *Christabel* seemed to me to represent our human nature. This human nature is combined of two elements, spiritual and fleshly ; and therefore it has bonds of sympathy with both, the fleshly standing in as near and dear a relationship as that of father, and by the influence of these dear bodily relationships—that is, by our dearest and sweetest affections—sin finds an entrance and a harbourage in the mind. But that is not all. *Christabel* is not only bound by ties of affection to her father, but has inherited a portion of his nature. She, in all her purity and innocence, has in her the innate germ at least of evil, the taint of natural sin ; and the muttered spells of *Geraldine*, besides their

external effect, awake in her an internal sympathy with evil, and her dream is not so much a hideous apparition conjured up by external influence, as a shape far more terrible and real, inasmuch as it is the creation of the workings of the innate evil in herself.

“ With open eyes (ah woe is me !)
Asleep, and dreaming fearfully,
Fearfully dreaming, yet, I wis,
Dreaming that alone which is.”

Again she is forced to assume the very look of sin, through unconscious sympathy :—

“ The maid, devoid of guile and sin,
I know not how, in fearful wise,
So deeply had she drunken in
That look, those shrunken serpent eyes,
That all her features were resigned
To this sole image in her mind :
And passively did imitate
That look of dull and treacherous hate,
And thus she stood in dizzy trance,
Still picturing that look askance,
With forced, unconscious sympathy.”

Now let us hear the conclusion. I think we may see in it a similar idea—that of toying with the evil unlovely tendencies of our nature merely for the sake of the “sweet recoil ;” tendencies which, though their charm seems to be broken, though they slumber, it is yet dangerous to mock.

“ A little child, a limber elf,
Singing, dancing to itself,

A fairy thing with red round cheeks,
That always finds and never seeks,
Makes such a vision to the sight
As fills a father's eyes with light ;
And pleasures flow in so thick and fast
Upon his heart, that he at last
Must needs express his love's excess
In words of unmeant bitterness.
Perhaps 'tis pretty to force together
Thoughts so unlike each other :
To mutter and mock a broken charm,
To dally with wrong that does no harm.
Perhaps 'tis tender too, and pretty,
At each wild word to feel within
A sweet recoil of love and pity.
And what, if in a world of sin
(O sorrow and shame should this be true !)
Such giddiness of heart and brain
Comes seldom save from rage and pain,
So talks as it is most used to do."

There is a peculiarity in the rhythm of "Christabel" —a peculiarity that now to us, who know Scott's poems and others of the same rhythm, does not strike us as remarkable. Let us hear what the poet himself says on this point : " The metre of " Christabel " is not, properly speaking, irregular, though it may seem so from being founded on a new principle, namely that of counting in each line the accents, not the syllables."

This irregularity is characteristic.

Coleridge cared very little for form. His idea of poetry was the very opposite of Pope's. To Pope the verse itself—with its balanced periods, and

its melodious rhythm—constituted poetry. How different this was from Coleridge's idea may be seen from the fact that he has given us specimens of poems written in prose, and a good many poems which (as "Christabel") are unfinished; that is to say, not cast into "requisite metre," as he calls it.

What would Pope have said to the following? It occurs in the preface to the "Solitary Date-tree," a short poem of which the first two stanzas are given in prose, the manuscript containing the original verses having been lost. "It is not impossible that some congenial spirit may find a pleasure in restoring 'The Lament' to its original integrity by a reduction of the thoughts to the requisite metre."

"Reliquum carmen in futurum tempus relegatum" (the rest of the poem is deferred for some future day): "to-morrow and to-morrow and to-morrow!"—such is the exclamation that ends one of these unfinished poems. It was that "to-morrow" that in some ways made his life so unhappy, so unfruitful. And yet I end as I began. We must not judge entirely by the substantial results. As a poet he stands very high—and would stand perhaps equally as high had he written nothing but the "Ancient Mariner" and that wonderful fragment, "Christabel." As a philosopher, though he has given us no perfectly rounded system (and indeed spoke with disregard of such systems) yet his influence has been very great. As a man, Coleridge was indeed to be

pitied for his "homeless aimless" life, and for the tormenting fiend that at one time nearly dragged him to the grave ; but, taken all in all, he was a man who for poetic vision, for loftiness, at least, if not for steadfastness of aim, and for spirituality of character deserves our deepest admiration. The upward-soaring tendency of his mind is recognizable in his philosophical writings, but it finds its native element in poetry ; and it is as a poet that he is truly great. Mrs. Browning in her "Vision of Poets" has expressed this characteristic by means of a fine simile, which will probably do more for us than volumes of disquisition—

"And visionary Coleridge, who
Did sweep his thoughts, as angels do
Their wings, with cadence up the Blue."

CHAPTER VII.

WORDSWORTH.

THERE are various reasons which make me approach the subject of Wordsworth with very great diffidence. In the first place, he is a poet who, if he is read at all, is probably read much—and consequently many whom I address may have given as much study to his poems as I have myself,—I say *study*, for to have merely read all his poems is nothing more than most have done. Secondly, there are such numbers of essays and reviews on the subject, that there would seem to be very little left to be said. Thirdly, and especially, I feel that of all poets Wordsworth is one of whom one can write least satisfactorily. All reviews and essays are eminently unsatisfying and useless, unless the poems themselves have been beforehand studied and appreciated by the reader. And when one has read and does appreciate Wordsworth, all essays are still unsatisfactory; for these poems have this characteristic above all others, that they appeal—if they appeal at all—

to feelings that each one possesses exclusively for himself, feelings that one cannot, if one would, communicate to others. There are, as all lovers of Wordsworth's poetry well know, many passages in his writings that seem, ever since we first read them, to be our own special property. Probably each one of us could name a certain year of his life, when his feelings were becoming peculiarly sensitive to the beauty of the external world, and struggling into a higher vitality, when faint gleams of some great glory filled him from time to time with mysterious longings and joys. At such a time it was, probably, that Wordsworth's poems came like the warm breath of spring to burst the bud, and unfold it to the sun—to reveal the full glory to his inmost heart. Wordsworth has been to many of us the one writer who, not by the powers of imagination has created for us new worlds and peopled our memory with new forms of grandeur or ethereal loveliness, but who has, as it were, recreated for us this world around us—this world which we are at times, after the thoughtless joys of childhood have passed, apt to look upon as a dreary prison-house; especially when, to use Tennyson's words, "the light is low, the heart is sick, and all the wheels of Being slow,"—when, to use once more Professor Dowden's words, "the persons we know seem to shrivel up and become wizened and grotesque—the places we have loved transform themselves into ugly little prisons—the ideals for which

we lived appear absurd patterns, insignificant arabesques, devoid of idea and beauty—our own heart a most impertinent and unprofitable handful of dust."

To have shed over our world that new light, of which he loves to speak,

" The gleam,
The light that never was on sea or land,
The consecration, and the poet's dream"—

for this, I think Wordsworth chiefly claims our gratitude and admiration. And this he does when he interprets nature to us, not by what are generally called imaginative creations, but rather by so placing common objects before us that they shall henceforth not merely be, as so many things and persons are, mere lifeless meaningless stumps and blocks—

" Rolled round in earth's diurnal course
With rocks and stones and trees,"—

nor that we should merely revel with an animal delight in these things of the senses, as children or as Circe's swine. In this Wordsworth fulfils our definition of a poet. He reveals to us the real inner meaning of things; and to grasp and set before one this meaning *is* a creative act of the imagination, for though the object may be a natural common thing, it has been recreated for us.

"It is," says Coleridge, and Horace tells us almost the same, "the prime merit of genius, and its most unequivocal mode of manifestation, so to repre-

sent familiar objects as to awaken in the minds of others a kindred feeling concerning them, and that freshness of sensation which is the constant accompaniment of mental no less than bodily convalescence. . . . In poems, equally as in philosophic disquisitions, genius produces the strongest impressions of novelty whilst it rescues the most admitted truths from the impotence caused by the very circumstance of their universal admission."

And he goes on to make the very just remark, and one that bears constant repetition, that many—most indeed—of the truths that are absolutely invaluable to us become perfectly useless because they are accepted so unhesitatingly and universally that we never realize them for ourselves, but they "lie bedridden in the soul side by side with the most despised and exploded errors."

To make these things realities to us—these common things, these common people, these common truths,—this is pre-eminently what Wordsworth does. And to receive his teaching each one must commune in his own heart with the poet, and be *still*. Such is the reason why I feel that any talking or writing about these poems is nearly useless ; and I would far rather fill my pages with quotations from the poems themselves. For each one who cares for Wordsworth has appropriated for himself the reality which this passage, that little expression, that epithet, that description of scene, or flower, or star, or cloud,

has made his own for ever. And he would resent it as intrusion if I happened to touch that same chord of feeling, whereas if no chord vibrate, all my words will be nonsense.

But there are other points besides this to be discussed. There is the life of the man, and we must at least briefly touch on that: there is the question of his language, and the choice of subjects, as well as his ideas about poetry itself, and about the poetic faculties.

The lives of Wordsworth and Coleridge were so intertwined that if we know one we know a good deal about the other. You remember that Coleridge was two years younger than our poet, who was therefore born in 1770. His father, John Wordsworth, was law agent to the Earl of Lonsdale, and lived at Cocker-mouth on the Derwent, in a manorhouse of that family. It was there that William was born—the second of four sons.

While at school at Hawkshead in the vale of Esthwaite, within view of Kirkstone Pass and Helvellyn, Wordsworth began that companionship with nature—climbing the crags, wandering through the woods, skating on the lake, and finding society in the cottages of the village folk,—which went far towards forming his character, a character that he kept, in spite of one period of “obscuraton of the master vision,” to the last. He was left an orphan early in life, and in poor circumstances. Neverthe-

less he seems to have had enough to take him to the University of Cambridge, where, to the annoyance of his guardian uncles, he devoted most of his time to the English poets, thus throwing away the chance of distinguishing himself in a way that would have secured him means of livelihood. His life at Cambridge, as well as his school-days at Hawkshead, are related with many graphic touches in the "Prelude," which was not published till after his death. In the vacations he would wander through the mountains and by the streams of his beloved northern land, often with his sister Dorothy by his side; and it was at this period that he met with his cousin Mary Hutchinson, whom he so beautifully describes in those well-known verses beginning "She was a phantom of delight," and who afterwards became his wife.

During his last summer vacation he and his friend Jones, "a youthful friend, he too a mountaineer," set out for the Alps, and spent their time—a time so valuable to those who are intent on "examinations, when a man is weighed, as in a balance"—in wandering on foot about France, Switzerland, and North Italy. It was indeed enough to make his uncles angry, and Wordsworth himself seems to have felt that he was acting rather imprudently, and deserved their reproaches :—

"A hardy slight
Did such unprecedented course imply
Of college studies and their set awards :

Nor had, in truth, the scheme been formed by me
 Without uneasy forethought of the pain,
 The censures, and ill omening of those
 To whom my worldly interests were dear."

Wordsworth does not seem to have been much impressed with Alpine scenery—at least not to an extent that we consider necessary for every tourist nowadays. He has, it is true, given us one or two fine pictures,—such as that of—

"The wondrous vale
 Of Chamouny
 With its dumb cataracts and streams of ice
 And motionless array of mighty waves ;"

and the southern descent of the Simplon towards Locarno—

"The immeasurable height
 Of woods decaying, never to be decayed,
 The stationary blasts of waterfalls,
 And in the narrow rent at every turn
 Winds thwarting winds, bewildered and forlorn,
 The torrents shooting from the clear blue sky,
 The rocks that muttered close upon our ears,
 Black drizzling crags that spake by the wayside
 As if a voice were in them, the sick sight
 And giddy prospect of a raving stream."

But he seems to have been relieved by a return to the less tremendous scenery and softer colouring of the Italian lakes, to the—

"Chestnut woods, and garden plots
 Of Indian corn tended by dark-eyed maids ;
 The lofty steepes and pathways roofed with vines,

Winding from house to house, from town to town,
Sole link that binds them to each other ; walks,
League after league, and cloistral avenues
Where silence dwells if music be not there."

There is no such "rapturous and fierce delight" in the magnificent grandeur of Alpine nature as we see in Byron's "Childe Harold" and "Manfred."

The year that Wordsworth left Cambridge was the year of the French Revolution. Shortly before, when he passed through Paris on his way to Switzerland he had seen the first signs of the coming change, and had joined with enthusiasm in the triumphant shouts that heralded its approach. On his return, finding no profession or line of life in which he could earn his bread, Wordsworth strayed about, somewhat as Coleridge, in an "aimless, homeless," manner. For some time he was in London, noting the faces and manners of men as he wandered through the streets, often muttering to himself—

"The face of every one
That passes by me is a mystery,"

and characteristically picking out for his sympathetic description among the "moving pageant" a workman nursing his baby, and a blind beggar. Then we find him again in Paris ;—then at Orleans ;—then once more in Paris, where he witnessed some of the horrors of the Reign of Terror. But he was at length obliged to leave the land of his adoption and, most reluctantly, to return to England.

I spoke of the great influence that the Revolution had on almost all of the poets of this time in England. This was especially the case with Wordsworth. As one reads the last two or three books of the "Prelude" or the third and fourth of the "Excursion"—for there the character of the Solitary is much the same—one sees how all his beliefs and hopes were crushed one by one; how his dreams of liberty which he fondly thought would be realized in France gradually vanished; how his violent upbraidings against his native land for warring upon France were in time exchanged for despair and silent shame.

Sceptical now of all human good, he became almost a disbeliever in divine goodness. It was a period of great darkness that his mind passed through—like that hour before the dawn which is said to be the darkest hour of the night.

"Now believing
 Now disbelieving : endlessly perplexed
 With impulse, motive, right and wrong, the ground
 Of obligation—what the rule, and whence
 The sanction ; till, demanding formal *proof*,
 And seeking it in everything, I lost
 All feeling of conviction, and, in fine,
 Sick, wearied out with contrarieties,
 Yielded up moral questions in despair."

Then it was that his sister's womanly faith and love helped him to dispel the thick cloud. Ever by his side, to use his simile, as a roadside stream that accompanies the traveller with its soft music, she

“preserved him still a poet,” and in her society he left the tumults of the city and the atmosphere of politics, and, wandering again through the once-loved, scenes of his childhood, was won back to nature. In nature and in the character of nature’s children he found an intense relief from all the perplexing failures of life.

That for the sake of studying subjects for his poems, with the intention of striking out a novel line and founding a new poetical school, a poet should associate with the poor and the forlorn, and with solitudes of nature, might be possible, and would merit little approbation. But this was not so with Wordsworth. His sympathies were with such people and such things ; and surely it is no cause of reproach to him that it was among the poor and simple, if not among publicans and sinners, that he chose to live, nor that among the solitudes of mountains he found relief and rest. We must bear these things in mind when we consider the extreme to which, in the opinion of most, he pushed his theory of poetry. I think the very peculiar circumstances of his life may perhaps make the circle of readers who can *wholly* appreciate him and his interests very small indeed. We shall not find it among the country farmers and villagers themselves, and we shall not find it among those of a higher class. Indeed I do not know that I have ever met or even heard of any one who is a *complete* disciple of Wordsworth—not even among the so-called

"Wordsworthians,"—though there are very many, both among the loftiest thinkers and the simplest lovers of nature, who feel that Wordsworth has been to them what no other poet ever can be.

A piece of good fortune—as in Coleridge's case—befell Wordsworth. He was left a small legacy; and now, his mind being freed from the harassing anxieties of money-making, he devoted himself to the life of a poet, and set up house with his sister at Racedown in Dorsetshire. It was here that Coleridge first made the acquaintance of Wordsworth, who soon afterwards with his sister removed to the neighbourhood of Nether Stowey. It was then that those memorable walks among the Quantock Hills began, and the "Lyrical Ballads" were published.

Then came the visit to Germany. The cause that led to their leaving Somersetshire is amusingly related by Coleridge in his "Biographia Literaria." The two poets were suspected of sedition on account of their skulking solitary habits, and a Government spy was sent down to watch them. "The dark guesses," he says, "of some zealous Quidnunc met with so congenial a soil in the grave alarm of a titled Dogberry of our neighbourhood, that a spy was actually sent down from Government. . . . After three weeks truly Indian perseverance in tracking us, he declared his belief that both my friend and myself were as good subjects as any in His Majesty's dominions." This

spy seems to have been blessed with a remarkably long nose, and confessed that he was much put out and puzzled, when behind a bank he listened to the two poets discussing metaphysics, at the frequent recurrence of the name of Spinoza, which he fancied was a nickname by which they signified him—the spy with the nose, or “Spy-Nosey.” Coleridge escaped from all charge of sedition, but his more solitary and sombre companion Wordsworth was not so lucky. Evidence was given “that this Wordsworth is either a smuggler or a traitor, and means mischief. He never speaks to any one, haunts lonely places, walks by moonlight, and is always *booing* about by himself.” Such evil repute did these reports of moonlight walks and booing about in solitary places occasion Wordsworth, that the further lease of his house was refused, and he set off for Goslar in Germany. I do not mean to trace further the details of his long life—for he lived to see his eightieth year,—but shall merely state a few prominent facts.

On his return from Germany (1799) he settled at Grasmere, where we have already seen him with Coleridge.

After another visit to France (1802) he married his cousin Mary Hutchinson, whom I have already mentioned. A description of her, more realistic than her portrait as the “phantom of delight,” is given by De Quincey. It is summed up in these words,

"She furnished a remarkable proof how possible it is for a woman, neither handsome nor comely according to the rigour of criticism—nay, generally pronounced very plain—to exercise all the practical fascination of beauty through the compensatory charms of sweetness all but angelic, of simplicity the most entire, womanly self-respect and purity of heart speaking through all her looks, acts, and movements,—*words* I was going to have added, but her words were few." Such a picture is interesting chiefly because of the lines which we all know so well.

Wordsworth's great work the "Recluse"—of which we possess now two parts, the "Prelude" and the "Excursion"—occupied him for many years. The "Excursion" was published in 1814; the "Prelude" not till after his death, in 1850. Among the later poems (from 1815 to about 1820) may be mentioned "The White Doe of Rylstone," "Laodamia," "Peter Bell," "The Waggoner," and a number of sonnets. In some of these may be noticed a more laboured style than in his earlier poems. "Laodamia" was an outcome of revived classical studies, and is very sonorous and grand in its language and rhythm.

Let us now for a short time consider the general question of Wordsworth's language, his crusade against what he calls "poetic diction," and the subjects that he chose. After this we will consider the nature and value of his poems without reference to their external form.

It is bewildering to even glance through the lengthy essays that have been written on his language and subject-matter. Perhaps of all these the best is one of those first written, by Coleridge. Whoever wishes to see the thing fairly, moderately, and expressively stated, I should advise to read Coleridge's "Examination of the Tenets Peculiar to Mr. Wordsworth." But perhaps it will be well to consider the subject without reference—except what reference may arise unconsciously—to any of such opinions, but merely on the merits of the case itself.

In the first place, as will be remembered, the school of poets that had immediately preceded Wordsworth (although Cowper had intervened) laid great stress on the point of language; that is, they so far considered a certain kind of language a prime necessity of poetry that not only (if their principles were true) could poetry not exist without it, but it could exist with that alone. The result was that poetical *thought*, *i.e.*, the creative act, was gradually disregarded and often entirely wanting in what was called poetry. It was against this idea that Wordsworth waged the battle, and like many other reformers he went too far toward the opposite extreme. How far it is to be excused in his case I have tried to show from the peculiar tendency of his mind, and his peculiar circumstances; but that he went too far is nevertheless true.

He contends that we should go to nature for our thoughts and our language. Perfectly true : nature alone affords us the true *materia poetica*. But when he goes farther, and says that the poet is to represent those thoughts and that language exactly as they exist in life—then he seems to me to contradict his own definition of the function of poetry, which, as you remember, is to “represent things, not as they are, but as they seem.” Where is the poet’s office then, if he is merely to reproduce what we can as easily see and hear without his help? What has been revealed to us of the inner meaning of these things? No. The poet’s imagination uses, it is true, the things of the senses, but he combines them, sets them in new lights, and shows us their ideal connection. This act of the poet’s imagination is (as we have seen) creative, and the result is not *natural*, in that it is a new creation, not necessarily conditioned by the laws of nature.

And if it be true that the language of a poet is the *shadow* of his thought, then that language is like the thought—it is not *natural* in the common sense of the word. Indeed Wordsworth found no little difficulty in his endeavours to practise his theory. Ever and again his imagination is lifting him off his feet, and his language, although always chastened and grandly simple, is generally very far removed from ordinary speech—especially from the speech of those pedlars and waggoners into whose mouths he puts it.

He himself allows that a certain deviation must be made—viz., that the order of the words may be changed for the sake of musical rhythm and rhyme. But although he draws the line here in theory, he does not do so in his poems—that is to say, whenever they are really poetry. He seems to recognize and lament this at times; for instance, when the Vicar (*"Excursion" vi.*) has repeated the story of Ellen, he adds,—

"Such was the tender passage, not by me
Repeated without loss of simple phrase."

It is easy to raise a smile at the expense of the poet when one reads isolated passages in which the "simple phrase" strikes one as being ludicrously simple, and the occurrence of which in the midst of a well-sustained description of things or feelings, in their unaffected grandeur, suddenly lets one down into a bottomless bathos. Here is an example of such "simple phrase," from the *"Thorn"* :—

"No more I know, I wish I did,
And I would tell it you :
For what became of this poor child
There's none that ever knew :
And if a child were born or no,
There's no one that could ever tell,
And if 'twas born alive or dead,
There's no one knows, as I have said."

One might quote much in this strain. Take for instance the whole of the *"Idiot Boy"*—where the

really intense silliness of the mother cannot be pardoned on the score of her affection :—

“ Johnny, Johnny, mind that you
Come home again, nor stop at all—
Come home again, whate’er befall,
My Johnny do, I pray you, do ! ”

And the poet’s exclamation at seeing Johnny astride on the pony that was so “ mild and good : ”—

“ O happy, happy, happy, John ! ”

So perfectly regardless—or perhaps so defiantly proud—was Wordsworth of what he thought natural, but what in poetry certainly strikes us as being ridiculous, diction.

Indeed one can hardly conceive the most ardent admirer of Wordsworth not wishing that much of this character could be eliminated from his poems. And yet at the same time one’s loyalty and reverence for the poet is not a whit lessened by this. Why is it so ? Why, for instance, though such an effusion as the “ Idiot Boy ” or “ Goody Blake ” by most poet’s would lower them indescribably in our estimation, do we not have this feeling with regard to Wordsworth ? I think it is because we are conscious of the fact that—like some intensely earnest, and even highly imaginative persons—he is utterly deficient in humour. The sense of humour seems to consist in the perception of incongruity. In most of us there is an inborn consciousness of the danger of that fatal step—that *facilis descensus*—from the brink

of the sublime into the abyss of the ridiculous. In Wordsworth this sense seems to be utterly wanting. No surgical operation, such as was recommended by Sydney Smith in the case of the Scotchman, could have ever insinuated into his head the perception of the ludicrous effect of his verses on those who are the victims of a demonic power compelling them to see the ridiculous element in such things—often all the more intensely ridiculous by contrast with the pathetic or the sublime.

Naturally nothing affords richer and easier sport for the humourists than those who, being without humour themselves, are utterly defenceless and at the mercy of their waggish persecutors.

To parody this class of Wordsworth's poems is easy—to parody, that is, their external form. Probably all know the well-known parody in "Rejected Addresses," which great Jeffrey, the king of critics, calls a "flattering imitation."

To sum up the matter of what is called poetic as against natural diction, if poetic diction means a certain pompous learned language which every poet must adopt for all subjects and moods—then poetic diction is worse than a ludicrous striving after the diction of common speech. But if it means that language which the poet creates, no less than he does create his thoughts, and which is the best—perhaps the only true—exponent of his thoughts, then poetic diction *is* a necessity.

- But, besides this, Wordsworth would have us believe that the thoughts and language most suitable for poetry are to be found—not among the learned and refined—not even among the educated—but among the poor and uneducated classes. As I have remarked before, we shall not find many among such people who will appreciate Wordsworth's *poetry*, however much they might appreciate the poet's sympathies if expressed unpoetically, especially if expressed by acts rather than words. There are many things that militate against the appreciation of poetry in this class—especially perhaps in England. The toils and anxieties in earning their bread; the consequent want of leisure and of opportunities for thinking of anything but the gross external facts of life; the low sensual pleasures that occupy them to the exclusion of intellectual recreation,—all these things, and others, preclude them to a great extent from learning from poetry (what indeed they may learn otherwise; for I believe means are given to all for the purpose)—from learning, I say, by means of poetry, to attain to the Divine Idea. And so, if he wrote for such readers, Wordsworth's poems are
- practically a failure; while if he did not write for them but for others, why did he choose these subjects and this language? He tells us his reason. It is because what he calls the "essential passions" find their fullest development in this class.

It may be true—though I much doubt it. I do

not for an instant doubt that the poor and uneducated may be morally the equals or the superiors of the rich, the refined, and the educated. But a moral state depends, it seems to me, on the counterbalance of temptation and resistance; and this equilibrium may be just as perfect—that is, the moral state may be just as high—when both temptation and resistance are small, as when they are great. But does poetry only dwell on such a state of equipoise, or the slight vacillations of the lightly laden balance? No: it requires for its subject the full development of human nature with all its passions in all its various forms; not only in the sins and sorrows of a village maiden, or the despondent woes of a solitary recluse, but in other shapes and forms—in the mad passion of a King Lear, the fiendish villainies of a King Richard or an Iago, in the love of a Romeo, in the jealousy of an Othello, in the aristocratic pride of a Coriolanus.

The question is whether, by adopting such subjects and language, Wordsworth has not done a work which no other poet has done for us. I think he has. He might have done great things otherwise, but he has done one thing supremely well, and for this we look to him as we look to no one else. He has revealed to us the meanings of common things, so that what we see around us in the world—the wayside flowers, the clouds, the stars the common acts and feelings of everyday life, the

ordinary people that we meet—are now no longer merely flowers and clouds and stars and acts and feelings and people, passing as a panorama before our senses, viewed by us (to use the poet's own words) in "disconnection, dead and spiritless;" they have now a vital connection with our very existence, and form a part of ourselves : as all things do when they are once viewed in connection with the central truth by which we live.

Now, this power of appropriating natural objects, so that they become (if one may so express it) a very part of one's sentient organism, until at length all nature around us, from the tiniest flower to the stars of the midnight sky, is but one mighty living thing, at whose centre lies our own soul—a living thing pulsating with the same life,—such a power Wordsworth *speaks* of as a philosopher, and such a power does he *develop* in us as a poet by his poetry.

Let us hear him as a philosopher—that is, speaking theoretically of this faculty. First, all faculties must have an object, and these two must be adapted for each other :—

" My voice proclaims
How exquisitely the individual mind
 . . . to the external world
Is fitted, and how exquisitely too . . .
The external world is fitted to the mind."

But though the mind is the receptive medium, it is not by thought but by a faculty above and

beyond all thought that we commune with nature.
This communion will be best described by the poet
himself :—

“ O then what soul was his when, on the tops
Of the high mountains, he beheld the sun
Rise up and bathe the world in light ! He looked—
Ocean and earth, the solid frame of earth
And ocean’s liquid mass, beneath him lay
In gladness and deep joy. The clouds were touched,
And in their silent faces did he read
Unutterable love. Sound needed none,
Nor any voice of joy ; his spirit drank
The spectacle ; sensation, soul, and form,
All melted into him ; they swallowed up
His animal being ; in them did he live,
And by them did he live : they were his life.
In such access of mind, in such high hour
Of visitation from the living God
Thought was not : in enjoyment it expired.”

Again, he speaks of—

“ That blessed mood,
In which the burthen of the mystery,
In which the heavy and the weary weight
Of all this unintelligible world
Is lightened : that serene and blessed mood,
In which the affections gently lead us on—
Until the breath of this corporeal frame,
And e’en the motion of our human blood
Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
In body, and become a living soul ;
While with an eye made quiet by the power
Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
We see into the life of things.”

Once more, of himself he says, in words that no repetition can rob of their charm,

“ I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts : a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man ;
A motion and a spirit that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things.”

The longing for a still closer union with nature—the wish, as Shelley expresses it, to “be made one with nature,” to surrender one’s self to the elements, to roam as a presence or a motion, an equal among the mightiest energies of earth and air,—has inspired one of the grandest passages in the “Excursion,” a passage which possesses a sublimity of a kind unknown to me in any other poet.

“ Oh what a joy it were in vigorous health
To have a body (this our mortal frame
With shrinking sensibility endued,
And all the nice regards of flesh and blood)
And to the elements surrender it
As if it were a spirit ! How divine
To roam at large among unpeopled glens
And mountainous retirements, only trod
By devious footsteps ; regions consecrate
To oldest time ! and careless of the storm
That keeps the raven quiet in her nest,
Be as a presence or a motion—one
Among the many there ; and, while the mists

Flying, and rainy vapours, call out shapes
And phantoms from the crags and solid earth,
As fast as a musician scatters sounds
Out of an instrument ; and, while the streams—
As at a first creation, and in haste
To exercise their untried faculties—
Descending from the region of the clouds,
And starting from the hollows of the earth
More multitudinous every moment, rend
Their way before them, what a joy to roam
An equal among mightiest energies !”

Such is Wordsworth's theory as to this communion with nature, this vision into the “ life of things,” from which we draw strength and inspiration. And notice in passing how incomparably deeper and grander is the truth that he thus inculcates than that of passive, almost *vegetable*, renovation by nature advocated by Goethe, and exemplified in “Faust.” But Wordsworth has done far more for us than to merely give us a theory. As a poet he must produce a reality for us—must create something for us by means of which we may realize the truth for ourselves. How then has he done this? By *recreating* common things for us so that we see them in connection with the central life of all—to use his own words, so that we “see into the life of things.”

It cannot be expected that we should be able to discern and define the power by which he has done this—any more than we can discern or define the agency that produces *life* in any form. It is a *creative* act. By some wondrous power he puts the object

in such a relation to the human mind that the thing henceforth lives for us and in us—so that, when present to our senses, these things have infinitely more meaning and reality to us than before, and, when absent, they often—

“Flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude.”

Now this appropriation of natural objects, this making them one with our very existence, must, as I said at the beginning of the chapter, be the result of personal experience in each one of us. It is idle to attempt to force the realization of such things on others by talking about it. Indeed I am almost inclined to lay down my pen, and say no more—so intensely do I feel the utter futility of words. And yet there are probably some at least among my readers who will on this subject have sympathies running parallel to, if not exactly coinciding with, my feelings, and will therefore apply to themselves a meaning from what I say if I speak about my own experiences.

I remember perfectly well, how, after reading the following passage (a passage that will mean nothing to those who have not gone through a similar experience), I went out of doors at night and saw exactly what is described ; and have seen it ever since ; and ever since have looked upon the sight itself and the description as exclusively *my own*.

“ Within the soul a faculty abides
 That with interpositions, which would hide
 And darken, so can deal, that they become
 Contingencies of pomp, and serve to exalt
 Her native brightness. As the ample moon
 In the deep stillness of a summer eve,
 Rising behind a thick and lofty grove,
 Burns like an unconsuming fire of light
 In the green trees ; and kindling on all sides
 Their leafy umbrage, turns the dusky veil
 Into a substance glorious as her own,
 Yea with her own incorporated, by power
 Capacious and serene—like power abides
 In man’s celestial spirit : Virtue thus
 Sets forth and magnifies herself ; thus feeds
 A calm, a beautiful, and silent fire,
 From the encumbrances of mortal life, . . .”

Another moon-picture I must give :—

“ The clouds are split
 Asunder—and above his head he sees
 The clear moon and the glory of the heavens.
 There in the black-blue vault she sails along
 Followed by multitudes of stars, that, small
 And sharp and bright, along the dark abyss
 Drive as she drives. How fast they wheel away,
 Yet vanish not. The wind is in the tree ;
 But they are silent ; still they roll along
 Immeasurably distant : and the vault
 Built round by those white clouds, enormous clouds,
 Still deepens its unfathomable depth.
 At length the vision closes, and the mind . . .
 Is left to muse upon the solemn scene.”

A certain phase of sunlight was made a reality
 for me by the following lines :—

“A blue sky bends o’er Yarrow Vale,
Save where that pearly whiteness
Is round the rising sun diffused,
A tender hazy brightness.”

What has not Wordsworth done for some of us
in deepening our feeling for *stars*—especially for a
solitary star?

“Fair as a star, when only one
Is shining in the sky.”

Or again :—

“Loud is the Vale. This inland depth
In peace is roaring like the sea :
Yon star upon the mountain-top
Is listening quietly.”

Or once more, in the sonnet to Milton :—

“Thy soul was like a star, and dwelt apart.”

And once again :—

“That glorious star,
In its untroubled element, will shine
As now it shines, when we are laid in earth,
And safe from all our sorrows.”

Flowers too—how infinitely sweeter and lovelier
are they, now that they have been inspired with a new
life and meaning. There are for instance, a few stanzas
on the Lesser Celandine which have made that flower
more to me than many others are,—not that it is
remarkable for its beauty or scent or in any other
way as a mere flower—indeed in this case it is a
dead flower. Here too I could point out the exact

spot, under a hedge in Hertfordshire, where, soon after reading these lines, I saw what the poet describes, and from that moment have looked upon that dead celandine as *my own*—a part of my existence.

Since writing these last words I have noticed a passage in which Wordsworth himself expresses exactly the same feeling.

“A rock there is whose homely front
The passing traveller slights :
Yet here the glow worms hang their lamps
Like stars, at various heights ;
And one coy primrose to that rock
The vernal breeze invites.

“What hideous warfare hath been waged,
What kingdoms overthrown,
Since first I saw that Primrose tuft,
And *marked it for my own !*”

Of all sights or memories of the flower world I think that of a mass of daffodils has, since I first read the following lines, the deepest delight for me, and the deepest meaning.

“I wandered lonely as a cloud
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,
When all at once I saw a crowd,
A host, of golden daffodils :
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.

“Continuous as the stars that shine,
And twinkle on the milky way,
They stretched in never-ending line
Along the margin of the bay ;

Ten thousand saw I at a glance,
Tossing their heads in sprightly dance.

“The waves beside them danced, but they
Outdid the sparkling waves in glee—
A poet could not but be gay,
In such a jocund company :
I gazed, and gazed—but little thought
What wealth the show to me had brought.

“For oft when on my couch I lie,
In vacant or in pensive mood,
They flash upon that pensive eye,
Which is the bliss of solitude,
And then my heart with pleasure fills,
And dances with the daffodils.”

As a description of a phase of feeling—not of external nature—I would cite the well-known lines beginning—

“Strange fits of passion I have known.”

Perhaps some of my readers may have appropriated this passage by realizing the feeling : and for such no comment is necessary.

In all these descriptions the object, or feeling, is presented to us in vital connection with the central truth by which we exist, and is thus inspired with life and meaning, and takes its place henceforth as a part of our real existence. I repeat this because I wish, before I end, to draw attention to the term which is sometimes applied to Wordsworth, namely, “Pre-Raphaelitism,” and to contrast it with the Pre-

Raphaelitism of a modern school—a school both of poetry and painting.

There seems to be a natural affinity between deep feeling and minute description. We all know how under the influence of any deep overwhelming sorrow or joy we are apt to fix our minds, with senses præternaturally sharpened, on the minute details of the present scene, and how these pictures are indelibly impressed on the retina of one's memory. The prisoner, as the judge assumes the black cap to pass the sentence of death, will watch with intense interest the movements of a spider catching a fly on the window-pane of the court-house. The face of the murdered man haunts for ever the memory of his murderer. The spot, the room, the persons, the sights and sounds, connected with that moment when our first great sorrow or joy fell upon us—are they not still as vivid in our minds as they were years ago?

Therefore we cannot wonder that a poet when he wishes to connect a thing with some deep feeling will describe that thing minutely,—so minutely that unconnected with the feeling the details would appear petty and ludicrously trivial. This we see in Wordsworth's poem of the "Thorn." The gnarled knotted old thorn-tree, covered with lichens; the little pond "three yards beyond," which is just three feet long and two feet wide; the little heaps of moss, "just half a foot in height,"—the description of these things

is apt to make us smile till we learn that a poor forsaken woman has drowned her baby in the pond and buried it under that heap of moss, the lovely vermilion tints of which are perhaps—or at least remind us of—spots of blood. Then these minute details are a natural co-efficient in producing the required state of feeling.

In this Pre-Raphaelitism the minute description, after it has done its work in fixing our attention, no longer demands our notice for its own merits. It is merely subservient to the feeling ; and that feeling—a feeling fraught with meaning—is *what remains for us*.

Now notice the difference when it is a case of false pathos. We shall see here, by the writer's own confession, that the only thing that remains to us is the trivial minute detail. The lines are by Rossetti, the founder of the modern Pre-Raphaelite school, and are meant to be descriptive of a mood of great desolation and grief:—

“ Between my knees my forehead was ;
My lips, drawn in, said not Alas !
My hair was over in the grass,
My naked ears heard the day pass.

“ My eyes, wide open, had the run
Of some ten weeds to fix upon ;
Among those few, out of the sun,
The woodspurge flowered, three cups in one.

“ From perfect grief there need not be
Wisdom or even memory ;

*One thing then learnt remains to me—
The woodspurge has a cup of three."*

Here we see the difference between true poetic recreation—through which the object described becomes a living reality, in living connection with our existence—and that projection of temporary "untranzquilized" meaningless passion into the object, electrifying it, as it were, into a momentary appearance of life-in-death, and leaving behind, as soon as the gust of passion is past, neither wisdom nor memory nor anything but the husk of the thing—the woodspurge with its "cup of three," which having no root fades and withers as we look at it, and is soon cast aside to rot on the rubbish heap of forgotten things.

In Wordsworth's poetry, on the contrary, we find no mere temporary pathos, no "tears, idle tears, we know not what they mean ;" but in the new-created world that he has produced for us "the meanest flower that blows can give thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears."

And Wordsworth's descriptions are not only true in a poetic sense, but are true also to nature—as is necessary in such recreations of natural things. As we saw some time ago, the creations of a poet are not necessarily subject to natural laws. He may form a poetic entirety even in contravention of such laws. But in Wordsworth's poems we do not find such creations. His are rather *recreations* of ordinary natural objects. He has power to speak to us of the

"sea that bares her bosom to the moon," or of the winds "upgathered like sleeping flowers," rather than to make us "have sight of Proteus rising from the sea," or "hear old Triton blow his wreathed horn." And in such recreations it is all important that the object be described faithfully. Of all poets Wordsworth is perhaps the most invariably faithful to nature, and most observant of natural facts, so that his broadest effects as well as his minutest details are faultless in their truth. "No one that I know," says Professor Shairp, "has yet laid his finger on a single mistake made by Wordsworth with regard to any appearance of nature or fact in natural history, though keen observers have done this in the case of both Walter Scott and Burns."

He himself, after mentioning the fact that when only fourteen years of age he observed that the leaves and boughs of an oak look black against a sunset, adds, "I recollect the very spot where this first struck me. . . I date from it the consciousness of the infinite variety of natural appearances which had been unnoticed by poets of any age or country, as far as I was acquainted with them; and I resolved in some degree to supply the deficiency."

What I have said about Wordsworth merely affords a further proof of the impossibility of expressing what can alone be realized by each one for himself through a sympathetic study of the poems themselves; and perhaps more in the case of Words-

worth than in that of any other poet I would wish what I have said to serve merely as an "introduction" to such study. On an earlier occasion I spoke of the ode on "Intimations of Immortality." It is the one work of Wordsworth on which all comments and epithets are more than ever unavailing. If it awakens a sympathy in the reader, then it probably becomes and remains for him absolutely priceless as a revelation (no mere statement) of his own deepest beliefs.

In conclusion, I must mention the sonnets—some of them perhaps the finest sonnets in the English language. Of these one might select as superlatively beautiful—as bright particular stars amid the constellation—the sonnet composed upon Westminster Bridge ; that addressed to Sleep, beginning with the line, "A flock of sheep that leisurely pass by ;" one "On a picture ;" and lastly, the indescribably lovely lines descriptive of evening, the music of which shall not be marred by any further words of mine :—

"It is a beauteous evening calm and free ;
The holy time is quiet as a nun
Breathless with adoration ; the broad sun
Is sinking down in its tranquillity ;
The gentleness of heaven is on the sea :
Listen ! The mighty being is awake,
And doth with his eternal motion make
A sound like thunder everlastingly."

CHAPTER VIII.

KEATS.

IT will probably be remembered how Rousseau adopted as his guide in life what he called "Sensibility," and how in his case, and on a more terrible scale in the French Revolution, passion — what Carlyle calls the "daemonic" part of man—became supreme, and the results were most lamentable.

It may also be remembered how, when we considered the nature of poetry, there seemed to be reasons for affirming, in opposition to some great authorities, that Taste is not the sole arbiter of art, and that the object of art is not merely the production of the beautiful. Indeed it appeared that if we accepted these definitions, we should be forced also to accept Plato's verdict, and banish poetry as a thing not only useless but injurious.

Poetry—if we have appealed to any purpose against this verdict—and not only poetry but all art, is capable of something far other than the mere production of beauty for the object of satisfying our taste. It is creative, and the reality that it creates exists as a reality by virtue of the meaning, or idea,

that it brings. Of this meaning—that is, of the reality and value of the creation—the supreme arbiter is our higher Reason, by which we recognize the idea as true, and neither our Understanding nor our Taste can reverse its judgment, unless they are grossly outraged.

The mere production of beautiful scenes and the excitement of our feelings is in itself nothing unless these scenes and these feelings be used by the poet for the one end of poetry that is of any value. It is merely an accumulation of what may prove poetic material.

Now to one gifted with poetic faculty this collected material may be, what nature itself is, a very different thing from what it is to most of us poor prosaic souls. Such an one needs no help from a fellow poet; he interprets these things for himself. And so diverse are human minds that it is utterly absurd and presumptuous for any one of us to lay down the law for any other on these points. What may be of true worth as poetry to you may not be so to me. In each of us lies the supreme arbitrament; and we must judge of a poet by the total effect that he has produced on us—by the living and life-giving ideas that he has given us, thus adding vigour to our true existence.

I will not apologize for once more reasserting this, for I feel that by thus recalling to memory the principles that I have so often—perhaps rather too often—insisted upon, I may help to make more

distinct the view which rightly or wrongly I take of Keats's poetry.

I shall now state briefly a few of the more significant facts of the poet's life, then consider his opinions with reference to poetry and other subjects, and lastly turn to his poems.

John Keats was born in Moorfields, London, in 1795. His father, who was killed by a fall from his horse when the poet was yet a child, had accumulated some means by keeping a livery stable. John was the third of five children. The chief characteristic of the younger generation seems to have been pugnacity: and at Mr. Clarke's boarding-school at Enfield the future poet distinguished himself chiefly by this quality. His mother died when he was fifteen, and he was removed from school (where he had formed an intimate friendship with Cowden Clarke, the head-master's son) and apprenticed to a surgeon at Edmonton. It was about this time that he first read Spenser, whose "*Faerie Queen*" seems to have opened the floodgates to his poetic faculty. His first production—one of considerable beauty, and containing many signs of his future strength—was a piece called an "*Imitation of Spenser*," written when he was seventeen. With an unquenchable passion he passed from Spenser to Chaucer, Milton, and Shakespeare, revelling especially in scenes and passages of rich imagery and voluptuous diction. "He brooded," says a writer (Masson) "over

fine phrases like a lover, and often when he met a quaint or delicious word he would take pains to make it his own by using it as speedily as possible in some poem he was writing." It was by means of translations alone that he learnt to adore with a passionate love the Greek poets. His sonnet (written in 1814), entitled "On first looking into Chapman's Homer," is almost Greek in its noble and simple grandeur. It is usually said that Keats possessed a poetic faculty akin to that of the Greeks. It is true that he—like all who are peculiarly sensitive to beauty of form—was an intense worshipper of Greek art and at times we find in his poems an almost sculpturesque beauty of outline. But that his imaginative power was of a Greek character I do not believe. His was essentially a reproductive genius. But of this more later.

Having served his apprenticeship, Keats removed to London to "walk" the hospitals. But the society of literary men and artists, such as Leigh Hunt, Hazlitt, the painter Haydon, and others, proved too great a fascination, and, abandoning the idea of the medical profession, he betook himself to the neighbourhood of Hampstead Heath with the distinct object of devoting himself to poetry. Here he published his first volume, containing some sonnets and minor pieces, studies and essays in verse, in which he tried his strength of wing. But he had now made up his mind to write a long poem, and carried

out his intention, although at times subject to fits of despondency, in which, as he says, he almost gave up in despair the idea of being a poet, and resolved to "drop into a Phaethon." For the purpose of composition he retreated to the Isle of Wight, and thence to Margate, and in about eight months returned to Hampstead with his "Endymion."

Some writers ridicule the idea that the reception which the "Endymion" met with had any great effect on Keats. That it actually brought about a death that was caused by consumption is of course not to be believed. That it made him doubt his own powers is not likely, seeing that he wrote much afterwards, and put even the vile scurrility of his *Quarterly Reviewer* to some use by devoting himself to a severer self-criticism. But that he felt most acutely, not only the more offensive attacks made on him, but also the cold recognition and the faint praise accorded to the poem by such men as Leigh Hunt and Shelley, is by no means disproved by the confident tone that he assumes in his letters on the subject. A sensitive—morbidly sensitive—nature such as his, while in its inmost soul it is withered and blighted by censure and dispraise, often assumes an almost defiantly proud exterior. At all events those who knew him best state that the effect produced on Keats was by no means trifling; and they were the only persons who would be likely to perceive the worm that was gnawing at the inmost core.

Besides this, other things conduced to increase his natural self-consciousness, if one may use the word in a sense that is applicable not only to him but his poems,—I mean that intense realization of self, which is very far removed from *selfishness*, but which would place every one from whom a man craves for sympathy in the exact position where he himself stands, and surround him with all the scene that is so affecting to himself. Such natures crave for sympathy and love. They are almost incapable of a truly noble love for others, untainted with self-regard. They are the exact opposite of the “sensitive plant.” And yet, I repeat, it is not exactly selfishness.

Among the causes that produced this state of mind were doubtless his rapidly failing health, and his passionate love for one whose affection he could not claim, with death’s seal set on his forehead. Soon the more serious symptoms of consumption set in ; but in spite of this he seems to have devoted all his energies, in the consciousness how short his time was, to poetry and study. In 1820 he published his “*Lamia*,” “*The Eve of St. Agnes*,” and other poems, among which was the “*Hyperion*.” But in order to prolong his brief term of life he was obliged to escape from the English winter, and after a short period of what must have been strangely mingled sweet and bitter experiences, passed amid the scenes and memories that at any other time would have filled him with inexpressible rapture, he died at Rome on

the 27th of February, 1821, at the age of twenty-five, and was buried in that Cestian cemetery of which Shelley has given such a lovely picture :—

. . . " a slope of green access,
Where, like an infant's smile, over the dead
A light of laughing flowers along the grass is spread.

And grey walls moulder round, on which dull Time
Feeds, like slow fire upon a hoary brand,
And one keen pyramid with wedge sublime,
Pavilioning the dust of him who planned
This refuge for his memory, doth stand,
Like flame transformed to marble ; and beneath
A field is spread, on which a newer band
Have pitched in Heaven's smile their camp of death. . . "

The grave in which Shelley's ashes are buried lies near that of Keats in this beautiful spot. Shelley's tombstone contains the appropriate * inscription "Cor cordium"—"Heart of hearts"—and three lines from the "Tempest." Keats's epitaph is a mistake, and must distress all those who have any knowledge of his real character. He had desired that it should be, "Here lies one whose name was writ in water." To this some well-meaning friend affixed, "This grave contains all that was mortal of a young English poet who on his death-bed, in the bitterness of his heart at the malicious power of his enemies, desired these words to be engraven on his tombstone,"—a comment

* Not the less appropriate because the poet's heart is wanting, a fact of which Lord Houghton, in his *Life of Keats* (1866), seems to be ignorant.

sadly out of harmony with the peaceful beauty of the scene.

The following description of his personal appearance, quoted by Lord Houghton, is given by a lady who met him at Hazlitt's lectures, before his fatal malady had laid its firm grasp upon him. "His eyes were large and blue ; his hair auburn,—he wore it divided down the centre, and it fell in rich masses on each side of his face. His mouth was full and less intellectual than his other features. His countenance lives in my mind as one of singular beauty and brightness. The shape of his face had not the squareness of a man's—it was so wide over the forehead and so small at the chin."

Let us now consider his avowed principles and how far he realized them. The following quotations from his letters state them distinctly, and again strike the key-note for us.

"I have not one opinion," he writes, "upon anything except matters of taste." Again, in explanation of what he calls "negative capability," he says, "With a great poet the sense of beauty overcomes every other consideration." Once more, "I am certain about nothing but the holiness of the heart's affections and the truth of imagination. What the imagination seizes as beauty must be truth, whether it existed before or not. The imagination may be compared to Adam's dream: he awoke and found truth. . . . I have never yet been able to perceive how anything can be known

for truth by consecutive reasoning. . . . However it may be, oh for a life of sensations rather than of thoughts!"

Our comment here would naturally be—Yes, it is perfectly true that beauty (not Vauxhall but heavenly beauty) implies truth; but if you limit it to mere sensation, it is useless, meaningless. Truth demands realization in word, thought, and deed. You would merely present an appearance to our senses, and do not teach us its meaning, so that it may take a place among the working materials of our life.

The poetry of Keats is the natural product of this doctrine of "negative capability," or sensuous receptivity. Its characteristic is the exact converse of what in such poets as Shelley we might call spirituality. It is wholly *unspiritual*. It has no teaching nor interpretation, but would merely place before us a "*thing* of beauty" to be "a joy for ever." That first line of the "Endymion" sums up the whole of Keats's theory. It is the "thing"—the material or imagined appearance that is to be the eternal joy, not the truth that it represents. Neither in the ancient nor the modern spirit is Keats a *teacher*.

Let us here take the opportunity of contrasting this negative doctrine, this *unspirituality*, which leaves us face to face with forms of beauty, and compels us to interpret them for ourselves with what we may call *false* spirituality, of which we have specimens in the poetry of the present day. In false spirituality

the poet does not merely present us with lovely forms, but he interprets them—and interprets them falsely. He unveils to us, instead of the real truth that they represent, a falsity. He would teach us that the real principles lying at the heart of beauty are the principles dictated to us by gross passions. Thus his teaching is, as I said, a lie and a delusion. He rants about spiritual truth but adores the idol. While Keats is no teacher at all, the poets to whom I allude are, in my opinion, the falsest of false teachers.

Keats is said to have possessed extraordinarily acute sensibilities. The pleasures of the palate, as they are called, gave him exquisite delight. For instance, Haydon the painter says that he had seen him cover his tongue with cayenne pepper in order the better afterwards to enjoy a glass of claret. He was passionately fond of music, and intensely sensitive to colour and scent.

A few quotations from his poems will illustrate this : first, a passage from “The Nightingale :”—

“ Oh for a draught of vintage that hath been
Cooled a long age in the deep-delved earth,
Tasting of Flora and the country green,
Dance, and Provençal song, and sunburnt mirth !
Oh for a beaker full of the warm South,
Full of the true, the blushful Hippocrene,
With beaded bubbles winking at the brim,
And purple-stained mouth,
That I might drink, and leave the world unseen,
And with thee fade away into the forest dim ! ”

A hundred more instances might be given. Here is one of wine suffusing water :—

“ For as delicious wine doth sparkling dive
In nectared clouds and curls through water fair.”

Then for an exquisite description of sweet tastes and scents take the list of spices in the “ Eve of St. Agnes :”—

“ And still she slept an azure-lidded sleep,
In blanched linen, smooth and lavendered,
While he from forth the closet brought a heap
Of candied apple, quince, and plum, and gourd,
With jellies smoother than the creamy curd,
And lucent syrups tinct with cinnamon,
Manna and dates, in argosy transferred
From Fez, and spiced dainties, every one,
From silken Samarcand to cedared Lebanon.

These delicacies he heaped with glowing hand
On golden dishes, and in baskets bright
Of wreathed silver : sumptuous they stand
In the retired quiet of the night,
Filling the chilly room with perfume light.’

As to the sense of touch, the “ Endymion ” is filled with embraces, and kisses, and softnesses, and smooth white arms, and the like. One beautiful expression is due to this sense. After being “ lapped and lulled along the dangerous sky ” in the arms of the moon-goddess, the entranced lover gradually sinks towards the earth, and—

“ A moment more
Our feet were *soft* in flowers.”

As a study in colours take a stanza from his juvenile imitation of Spenser :—

“ There the kingfisher saw his plumage bright
Vying with fish of brilliant dye below,
Whose silken fins and golden scales' light
Cast upward though the waves a ruby glow ;
There saw the swan his neck of arched snow,
And oared himself along with majesty ;
Sparkled his jetty eyes ; his feet did show
Beneath the waves like Afric's ebony,
And on his back a fay reclined voluptuously.”

Another, of more radiant and crystalline lustre, is from the “ Endymion :”—

“ Before the crystal heavens darken
I watch and dote upon the silver lakes
Pictured in western cloudiness, that takes
The semblance of gold rocks and bright gold sands,
Islands and creeks and amber-fretted strands,
With horses prancing o'er them, palaces
And towers of amethyst.”

But of all descriptions appealing to the sense of colour, perhaps the richest is given in the well-known stanzas from the “ Eve of St. Agnes.” The moon is shining through the richly stained window of Made-line's bedroom, and throws the colours on her as she kneels in prayer. The fact that the moonlight does throw such colours I have heard questioned. But an appeal to nature will prove that it is so, though it is of not much moment whether the fact is naturally true as long as it is so poetically.

"A casement high and triple-arched there was,
 All garlanded with carven imageries,
 Of fruits and flowers, and bunches of knot-grass,
 And diamonded with panes of quaint device,
 Innumerable of stains and splendid dyes
 As are the tiger-moth's deep damasked wings ;
 And in the midst, 'mong thousand heraldries,
 And twilight saints, and dim emblazonings,
 A shielded scutcheon blushed with blood of queens and kings.

"Full on this casement shone the wintry moon,
 And threw warm gules on Madeline's fair breast,
 As down she knelt for heaven's grace and boon ;
 Rose-bloom fell on her hands, together prest,
 And on her silver cross soft amethyst,
 And on her hair a glory like a saint."

Of the "ravishment" of tones many examples might be given, such as "Sweet music breathed her soul away," "The sound of flutes and viols ravishing his heart," "The music yearning like a god in pain," and whole stanzas from "The Nightingale."

Thus it is that Keats gives us in great luxuriance all the most splendid materials for a picture—but a true poetic picture it is not. The lovely forms of Grecian gods and goddesses, of nymphs and naiads, with which he peoples this luxuriant scenery are "things of beauty" certainly, but, to me at least, they have no poetic meaning. And if, not content with the luxurious sensation occasioned by his descriptions, we attempt to work out a meaning, we generally find ourselves driven back to the simple fact of the old Greek myth, and turn from the scenery of the "Endymion" to the scenery of nature itself.

What Sara Coleridge says on this point is very true : " I admire Keats extremely, but think he wants solidity. His path is all flowers, and leads to nothing but flowers, stretching on *ad infinitum*." How infinitely more one little primrose or celandine may be to us than all this flowery luxuriance !

The imagination of Keats seems to me to be limited to a power of conjuring up scenes of great sensuous beauty and enchantment, in which he places us, swooning with ecstasy of pleasure, or else wondering at the vivid effects of the scenery,—but in both cases utterly at a loss as to what it all really means.

The following passage from the "Endymion" is a good example of swooning rapture. It describes the scene that I mentioned before—his being borne through the depths of the sky in the arms of the moon-goddess, and their descent to the earth.

" Ah ! 'twas too much ;
 Methought I fainted at the charmed touch,
 Yet held my recollection, even as one
 Who dives three fathoms where the waters run
 Gurgling in beds of coral ; for anon
 I felt up-mounted in that region
 Where falling stars dart their artillery forth,
 And eagles struggle with the buffeting north
 That balances the heavy meteor-stone——

* * * * *

There hollow sounds aroused me, and I sighed
 To faint once more by looking on my bliss.
 I was distracted ; madly did I kiss
 The wooing arms which held me, and did give
 My eyes at once to death ; but 'twas to live,

To take in draughts of life from the gold fount
 Of kind and passionate looks. . . .
 Ah, desperate mortal ! I even dared to press
 Her very cheek against my crowned lip,
 And at that moment felt my body dip
 Into a warmer air ; a moment more,
 Our feet were soft in flowers."

As a vivid scene—such indeed as a painter might give us—take the passage that I quoted some time ago with reference to word-painting, the first stanza of the "Eve of Saint Agnes :"—

" Saint Agnes' Eve—ah, bitter cold it was !
 The owl for all his feathers was a-cold,
 The hare limped trembling through the frozen grass,
 And silent was the flock in woolly fold.
 Numb were the beadsman's fingers as he told
 His rosary, and as his frosted breath,
 Like pious incense from a censer old,
 Seemed taking flight for heaven without a death,
 Past the sweet Virgin's picture, while his prayer he saith."

This being the sole object of Keats's poetry—to set lovely scenes and forms before one in all their voluptuous beauty—we naturally find that his language partakes of the same character. Everything runs to exuberant growth, like some tropical forest. One of these exuberances is that of *introduced* pictures, which, as will be remembered, when used to develop a poetic idea, are often exceedingly effective, and constitute one of the specialities of poetry as compared with the other arts. In describing the wealth of Isabella's brothers there are at least six different

pictures introduced, wonderfully vivid it is true, but distracting in their luxuriance. They are the products of an uncurbed *fancy* rather than of imaginative power.

“With her two brothers this fair lady dwelt,
 Enriched from ancestral merchandize,—
 And for them many a weary hand did swelt
 In torched mines and noisy factories,
 And many once proud-quivered loins did melt
 In blood from stinging whips : with hollow eyes
 Many all day in dazzling river stood
 To take the rich-ored driftings of the flood.

“For them the Ceylon diver held his breath,
 And went all naked to the hungry shark ;
 For them his ears gushed blood ; for them in death
 The seal on the cold ice with piteous bark
 Lay full of darts.”

Contrast with this the pictures that Dante introduces in the midst of the gloom and ice-fields of the *Inferno*—such as the frogs, and village maid who dreams of reaping. Seven words complete his picture of an Italian night in harvest time—a picture which, to use Matthew Arnold's expression, we feel to be an *inevitable* factor of the poetic entirety : and for this reason it lives for ever in the memory in connection with that Infernal scene.

This luxuriance is certain at times to offend. Passion intrudes when taste alone holds sway. The raptures and exclamations—the O's and ahs and alases and blisses and kisses and swoons—jar

upon one. They want repose. And this is exactly why Keats's Grecian gods and heroes (to say nothing of his goddesses and women) are so very unlike the real thing. "Hyperion" is utterly unlike a Greek poem on this account if for no other reason. It is true that in Homer the god of war can yell—and when he *does* yell it is with the voice of ten thousand warriors. But as a rule there is the dignity and restraint of sculpture in the ancient gods and heroes. In Hyperion there is none. What the poet says of Hyperion himself is true, to some extent, of the whole poem :—

" His voice leapt out, despite of godlike curb."

Then Apollo's "white melodious throat throbs with the syllables" as he addresses Mnemosyne : and among the very last words of the unfinished Third Book we read, "Apollo shrieked." This want of statuesque repose prevented Keats from succeeding in the drama in the only way in which he could have succeeded, *i.e.* by the reproduction of the Greek. He had very little if any at all of the creative power necessary for a dramatist. The only attempt that he made in dramatic poetry was "Otho" (a play that he wrote in conjunction with a friend), which was a signal failure.

Other faults (though it is not my object to pick out and magnify small defects) are—pompous expressions, "Miltonic inversions," as he himself calls them ; absurd straining after effect, as in "nectareous camel draughts" of love ; conceits and forced ideas,

often seemingly evoked by the temptation of a melodious rhyme, and a few false rhymes, which the word-critics have hunted out. On the other hand we can set against these a sweetness and richness of fancy and language, an earnestness, and a freedom from any gross tendency in his thoughts, which might hardly have been expected in one of such sensuous a nature.

But, in spite of that first line of the "Endymion," these lovely forms are not in themselves a joy for ever.

Ever and again, in the midst of its dreamy rapture, the soul wakes up and finds the dull cold day around it—such as he himself describes after the ecstatic flight through heaven in the arms of the goddess. He awakes from sleep :—

"Up I started. Ah ! my sighs, my tears,
My clenched hands—for lo the poppies hung
Dew-dabbled on their stalks, the ouzel sung
A heavy ditty, and the sullen day
Had chidden herald Hesperus away
With leaden looks : the solitary breeze
Blustered and slept, and its wild self did tease
With wayward melancholy."

Moods of morbid despondency and self-consciousness are the result of surrendering one's self to "sensation." We have noticed them in his actual life ; we can see them in his poems. Ever and again the vision fades away, and he is "tolled back," as by a mournful bell, to his own self. In the last stanza

of "The Nightingale"—after that ecstasy, while he seems to float away on the bird's voice, and when—

" Now more than ever seems it rich to die,
To cease upon the midnight with no pain,"

a single word breaks the spell.

" Forlorn ! the very word is like a bell
To toll me back from thee to my sole self !
Adieu ! the fancy cannot cheat so well
As she is famed to do, deceiving elf.
Adieu, adieu ! thy plaintive anthem fades
Past the near meadows, over the still stream,
Up the hill side ; and now 'tis buried deep
In the next valley glades ;
Was it a vision, or a waking dream ?
Fled is that music. Do I wake or sleep ?"

Most of us probably know these moods—when the soul wakes and finds the dull dreary leaden day about us, when everything seems unreal and meaningless—when we ourselves seem the only existence amid a dreary solitude. I have spoken more than once of such moods. It may be that it is only a few who experience this, and that I am wrong in saying that most of us know what it means ; but for those who do have this experience I will, for the sake of illustration, quote a few lines of a date subsequent to that of Keats, and composed in a different spirit :—

" As in a starlit hour of night,
Awakened by some sudden sound,
We start, and through the glimmering light
Cast timid glances all around ;

And every old familiar thing,
 The smouldering hearth, the vacant chair,
 The shelf, the broken curtain ring,
 The littered table—all are there ;—
 Are there, but some mysterious change
 Has passed upon them, for they loom
 Like things unearthly, weird and strange,
 About the dark and silent room :
 Thus oft my spirit starts and wakes,
 And finds it midnight, drear and dark,
 And trembles as around it takes
 A fearful glance ; and seems to hark
 To some deep bell, or sudden cry,
 That still re-echoes in the air ;
 And things about life's chamber lie
 E'en as in daylight—all are there,
 But changed : all seem unreal, unknown,
 Vain phantoms of the things that be :
 There seemeth nought but I alone,—
No God, no heaven, no hell—save me.”

Now though not a few may possibly know this mood, I think it is felt most intensely and most frequently by the man whose sense of enjoyment in material things is keenest. *He* feels, more than others, the shaft of satiety, and, with Keats, is apt to lament—

“Where's the eye, however blue
 Doth not weary? Where's the face
 One would meet in every place?
 Where's the voice, however soft,
 One would hear so very oft?”

The story of “*Lamia*,” too, the woman-serpent—a type of the venomous sting of pleasure—shows, I think,

that this feeling grew upon Keats as he lived ; and, possibly, had he lived longer he might have seen that his doctrine of sensation was false, and that to achieve any true work in poetry a man must believe in and use other faculties besides "negative capability," or sensibility to beauty, no less than in life, if we wish to work any positive good in the world, we must not follow the example of a Rousseau.

Moreover, as might be expected, the highest bliss for such natures, after the hollowness of pleasure is discovered, whether in this world or in the next (if indeed they allow that there be a next) will be the possession of that "passionless bride, divine tranquillity," of calm unconsciousness and sweet unruffled rest after the storm of the passions. Such was the celestial bliss of the gods of Lucretius and his master, Epicurus :—

"The gods, who haunt
The lucid interspace of world and world,
Where never creeps a cloud, or moves a wind,
Nor ever falls the least white star of snow,
Nor ever lowest roll of thunder moans,
Nor sound of human sorrow mounts to mar
Their sacred everlasting calm ; . . . and such,
Not all so fine, nor so divine a calm,
Not such, nor all unlike it, man may gain
Letting his own life go."

Such calm as Tennyson here describes—or one not "all unlike it"—Keats too yearned for. He speaks of the lower "den," far below the den or

chamber of the senses, where in the tranquil swoon of insensate blessedness a man may have rest from all his labours and all his passions :—

“ But few have ever felt how calm and well
Sleep may be had in that deep den of all.
There anguish does not sting, nor pleasure pall ;
Woe-hurricanes beat ever at the gate,
Yet all is still within, and desolate.”

Such is this “Cave of Quietude”—this “Happy gloom,” and “Dark Paradise :”—

“Where those eyes are the brightest far that keep
Their lids shut longest in a dreamless sleep.”

“Oh he was dark, very dark,” says Sara Coleridge, quoting another’s words concerning Keats. “Is it not the fact,” she continues, “and a painful truth that must forcibly strike every reader of Keats’s letters and life, together with the mass of his poetry, that Keats never dwelt upon the great exalting themes which concern our *higher* peace ?”

It is indeed this higher peace that is so sadly wanting in him as a man and as a poet. Hence sprang turbulence of passion in thought and language ; hence weak despondencies and his morbid unmanly sentimentalism, which Sara Coleridge justly condemns in regard to his description of Adonis. “I do think it,” she says, “rather effeminate in a young man to have even dreamed such a dream, or presented his own sex to himself in such a *pretty-girl* form. . . . This effeminacy is the weak part of

Keats. Shelley has none of it. . . . I think I have a right to preach on *this* theme, just because I am a woman myself. Men in general are frights, *especially before and after* five and twenty."

But if we seek for the good instead of being solely occupied in detecting his faults, we can find exquisite beauty in his poetry, and it is our own fault if we interpret it amiss and put it to a wrong use. The following passage is one of extreme loveliness, musical and clear,—one that has haunted me for years like a carillon of sweet bells. He is speaking of love, and how we are ready to abandon all for its sake.

"And truly I would rather be struck dumb
Than speak against this ardent listlessness—
For I have ever thought that it might bless
The world with benefits unknowingly :
As does the nightingale up-perched high
And cloistered among cool and bunched leaves—
She sings but to her love, nor e'er conceives
How tip-toe Night holds back her dark grey hood.
Just so may love, although 'tis understood
The mere commingling of passionate breath,
Produce more than our searching witnesseth :
What I know not : but who of men can tell
That flowers would bloom, or that green fruit would swell
To melting pulp ; that fish could have bright mail,
The earth its dower of river, wood, and vale,
The meadows runnels, runnels pebble stones,
The seed its harvest, or the lute its tones,
Tones ravishment, or ravishment its sweet,
If human souls did never kiss and greet ?"

And yet compare this—however sweet—with Shelley's conception of "Love on its awful throne of patient power." What teaching is there here? What *are* these benefits of love? The poet himself answers that he knows not—no more than Tennyson can tell us the meaning of his "idle tears."

Though Keats seems to me to be almost wholly wanting in the truly poetic or creative faculty by which an "entirety" is formed, he gives us pictures not only of great beauty and richness but of pathos and sublimity.

The following is a very beautiful specimen. Speaking of the song of the nightingale, he says :—

" Perhaps the self-same song that found a path
Through the sad heart of Ruth, when sick for home
She stood in tears among the alien corn ;
The same that oftentimes hath
Charmed magic casements opening on the foam
Of perilous seas, in fairy lands forlorn."

The picture of Ruth in tears among the alien corn is in itself very tender, beautiful, and pathetic. Yet I do not see what true meaning it has. It brings our own tears to the eyes when we think of her—it agitates us—but to no purpose. The second is also a fine picture—a castle window above a dark perilous sea, where perhaps some spell-bound imprisoned lady looks forth at night in the anguish of hopeless despair, and hears the voice of the nightingale. But, like most of his pictures, it has none of that living reality

which a work of art should have for us. It is as unreal as a dream.

As a specimen of what at least approaches sublimity—though it is, I think, partly marred by restraint—may be taken the speech of Saturn in the “Hyperion.” In the fierce agony of despair at his overthrow the ancient monarch of heaven calls out his own name to recall himself to a consciousness of his former self, and passionately demands a new chaos from which to create another heaven and another earth :—

“Thea, Thea, Thea ! where is Saturn ?
 This passion lifted him upon his feet,
 And made his hands to struggle in the air,
 His Druid locks to shake and ooze with sweat,
 His eyes to fever out, his voice to cease.
 He stood, and heard not Thea’s sobbing deep ;
 A little time, and then again he snatched
 Utterance thus—‘ But cannot I create ?
 Cannot I form ? Cannot I fashion forth
 Another world—another universe—
 To overbear and crumble this to nought ?
 Where is another chaos ? Where ?’ That word
 Found way unto Olympus and made quake
 The rebel three.”

When the body of Shelley was discovered there was found in his pocket, besides his beloved *Æschylus*, a copy of Keats’s poems, doubled back—if I remember right—at the “Hyperion.” Byron also had an intense admiration for the same piece, and declared that it was as “sublime as *Æschylus*.”

Such admiration was to be expected. Keats is, no less than Spenser, a poet's poet. He presents scenes which a poet will interpret, even as he will interpret nature itself. His writings are, as it were, a rich treasure-house of poetic material. But for us there is at least this danger—that if we search for the root of this luxuriant Basil plant “in perfumed leaflets spread,” we may find something not unlike that mouldering head amid the damp soil watered by Isabella's tears.

I mean that our enjoyment of the poems of Keats, as of many lovely and delicious things in this world, may spring merely from our sensuous desire for voluptuous images. If so, let us blame ourselves and not the poet.

But it is very different when a poet not only places lovely and voluptuous forms before us for our private interpretation, but assumes the garb of the teacher and teaches us a lie. This at least Keats does not do, and so far the negative is superior to the positive.

I think the time of life, and the mood, in which Keats's poems are both best appreciated and best used by us, is the period and mood of receptivity—when we drink in with rapture, without much discrimination or wish to discriminate, all that is lovely and sweet in visible nature, and in that other nature which poetry can create for us, and which Keats reproduced for us in, if possible, more than its natural

loveliness. In another sense than he deemed, "his name is writ in water"—

"On wood-embowered pools the moonlight's gleam
Oft ciphers with its silver rays his name."

His poems are, as it were, another nature, and in the truest sense, to use Shelley's exquisite words,—

"He is made one with Nature ; there is heard
His voice in all her music, from the moan
Of thunder, to the song of night's sweet bird ;
He is a presence to be felt and known
In darkness and in light, from herb and stone,
Spreading itself where'er that Power may move
Which has withdrawn his being to its own."

CHAPTER IX.

BYRON.

“Toi, dont le monde encore ignore le vrai nom,
Esprit mystérieux, mortel, ange ou démon.”

Such are the three aspects under which at different times we are apt to regard Byron, as he appeals to our various sympathies or antipathies. And what is true of the man is true of his poems ; for perhaps no poet is so inseparable from his writings—he lived them, and lives in them.

Therefore it is of less importance to relate his life and to discuss his character. There is also no lack of books and essays on the subject, of which I might mention Moore's life, and Trelawny's vigorous narrative, besides what Hobhouse (Lord Broughton), the Countess Guiccioli, Karl Elze, and others have to say, in praise or abuse.

So much indeed has been written and is read on the subject of Byron, that to most an abstract of his life, or an analysis of his personal character, would probably convey little new information. Besides which, I feel that his life and character, however in-

teresting, are not subjects that tend to much practical good. The intensity of his genius seems to throw a halo round the man, and dazzles us, so that we cannot distinguish his real outlines.

I intend therefore, as far as may be possible, to avoid this Charybdis, and trust that I shall not in so doing run upon the Scylla of dry disquisition.

And, first of all, what were his own ideas on the subject of poetry? In this, as in all things, Byron's expressed opinions were of almost no value. No man ever meant so little what he said, or said so little that he meant. No man ever had such a bottomless pit of negation in his nature. To disbelieve, is (as Paley tells us) merely to believe in doubt instead of certainty. It is itself a kind of belief. But Byron's was doubt within doubt, one within the other interminably, like Ezekiel's wheels.

"When Bishop Berkeley * said 'there was no matter,'
And proved it, 'twas no matter what he said."

* * * * *

"There's no such thing as certainty, that's plain ;

* * * * *

So little do we know what we're about in
This world, I doubt if doubt itself be doubting."

And again—

"O Doubt ; if thou be'st Doubt, for which some take thee,
But which I doubt extremely."

Such was Byron's opinion about certainty, if indeed

* Bishop Berkeley wrote the "Minute Philosopher." He denied the objective existence of the material world.

it can be called an opinion. It is not badly summed up by the author of the parody on Byron in the "Rejected Addresses :"—

" Thinking is but an idle waste of thought,
And nought is everything, and everything is nought."

He certainly laid very little importance himself on these opinions of his—these doubts within doubts—and I think he was right. We learn but little from them, which we can apply as a test to his poems. But it will be well to glance at them. It seems to me that Byron's expressed opinions—like almost all his conduct—were the result of a spirit of opposition, not unmixed with motives of pride and a petty ambition. It was a sense of his inferiority, of the hopelessness of ever rivalling such a poet, that made him speak slightly of Shakespeare. Milton and Shakespeare, according to him, are but transitory glories; they have risen, and they will set in oblivion. "If you like you may call Shakespeare and Milton pyramids," he says, "but I prefer a temple of Theseus or a Parthenon to a mountain of burnt bricks." What then was this Parthenon? It was Pope's poetry. All his contemporaries, and all the great poets of the Renaissance, and he himself in so far as against his own theory he allowed himself to be influenced by them, were, in language that he borrowed from Voltaire, nothing but barbarians. In this opinion I can see nothing but a spirit of contradiction and a desire to attract notice. Had he really believed in it he would

have practised it to better purpose ; but the force of his innate genius swept him down its natural course, and made him in his greater poems practise the very reverse of what he preached.

Karl Elze, who, with German assiduity, has written a book of four hundred and thirty pages on Lord Byron, conceives it possible that the sympathies of the poet for Pope were partly excited by the fact that both suffered from bodily deformity. It is just possible, although I think stronger motives may be discovered, namely, intolerance of rivalry, and a consequent depreciation of what he really felt to be inimitably great. On the other hand, I fancy that Byron's and Pope's characters had some affinities. They were both cynics, not in the ancient but the modern sense of the word. This cynicism is so apparent in most of Byron's poems, that we may pause for a few moments to consider it. I think if we view the character of Byron in contrast with that of Shelley, we may see the real nature of this quality. No one would accuse Shelley of cynicism, whereas it is a word that naturally occurs to one as soon as we hear the name of Byron. What is this quality that forms the contrast ?

Shelley and Byron are often classed together as men who both sinned against the forms of society, and suffered to some extent social excommunication. Thus far they may justly be so classed. Both were genii of destruction. But Shelley was more, and just in so far as he was more he is to be valued.

The world is so overbuilt nowadays that perhaps before we can construct we are compelled to pull down and remove what occupies our ground. Yet this is only a preliminary work—it is a work not for the architect or builder's art, but for the hodman—no less than is that of collecting material.

The only reality is perfection : the only true belief is a certainty of the existence of perfection, and the only true work is work in that direction. One act, one word, one thought—ay, one look—that to ourselves or to others reveals the existence of what is good excels, and excels by the sum total of its own value, all the destruction wrought in the earth by those whose mission has been to destroy rather than to fulfil—by all cynics, satirists and critics, in so far as theirs has been merely a destructive energy.

Has it not happened that in some mood of bitterness, when the world and all the inhabitants thereof were to us a thing of contempt or even hate, as we wandered perhaps through the filthy crowded streets, while past us flowed a stream of faces—children's faces once, but now with pallid cheeks, and fevered lips, and shrunken eyes, glittering with the lust for gold, or fierce with disappointed greed, or dulled with stupid satiety, and staring in vacant insolence,—when for very sadness we could scarcely smile in bitterness ;—has it not happened that there has passed by, amid that throng, some sweet face with eyes of patient love and purity? Or has some bright rippling laughter

caught the ear? And was not life another thing at once? How does that face, that sweet laughter, live still in the memory, and help us in many a dark hour—though they who have done this thing for us have passed on, away for ever, unconscious as is a star or flower of the light or sweetness that it has shed! Such power a poet too may have; and this power is the very reverse of satire and cynicism.

That there is such a thing as valuable satire untainted by cynicism, and valuable criticism, intent to reveal the true as well as to expose the false, I do not for an instant deny. But neither consists in mere ridicule. If men are eager, and bitter, and vehement in denunciation of the evil, even this is better than laughter; but this is not enough. They must be no less earnest in applauding the good, or else their satire will denote and promote at the best merely a cynical apathy for the good; and one consequence of such apathy for the good, is a liability to sympathize with the very follies that are ridiculed. In these two points—cynical raillery, and an apathy for the good, if not an actual sympathy with the follies that he ridicules—Byron firstly effects nothing, and secondly effects evil.

In spite of his great admiration of Byron's poetic talents, Goethe is compelled to say of him, "His perpetual negation and fault-finding is injurious even to his excellent works. For not only does the discontent of the poet infect the reader, but the end of

all opposition is negation; and negation is *nothing*. If I call bad bad, what do I gain? But if I call good bad, I do a great deal of mischief. He who will work aright must never rail; must not trouble himself at all about what is ill done, but only about doing well himself. For the great point is not to pull down, but to build up, and in this humanity finds pure joy."

The first necessity of true satire is that it should distinguish rightly between good and evil, between what is real and what is often so terribly like it—its sham. And it is only possible, I believe, for humility and charity to rightly discern such things—not for self-confidence and a sneering sagacity. So that he who alone can distinguish aright the follies of the world, though he may denounce in indignation, is more likely to weep than to sneer; to help to build up than to destroy; he is ever ready to sympathize with and support weakness, to teach the beauty of purity, to reveal by his written words, and no less by his actions, the one great reality that underlies all things. He will not give us a "Road to Ruin" nor a "Don Juan," but a Cordelia, an Imogen, a Christabel, or a St. Margaret. Such is not what the cynic does. If he denounces, it is not with real indignation. He is either like Voltaire, who—

"Breathed most in *ridicule*—which as the wind
Blew where it listed, laying all things prone,
Now to o'erthrow a fool, and now to shake a throne ;"

or else, like that "lord of irony," as Byron calls Gibbon, "sapping a solemn creed with solemn sneer," he utters his contempt and curse, and withdraws himself into the sublime solitude of his cynic's tub, centralizing all reality and truth to a single point, and that point his inmost self—the core and centre of all his doubted doubts.

"My thoughts their dungeon know too well :
Back to my breast the wand'ers shrink,
And droop within their silent cell."

He *must* have something positive, something to cling to for support ; and, amidst his half-hearted revelries in pleasures that he despises but cannot renounce, he seeks rest and finds none—neither in his ridicule nor in the thing ridiculed. But even in that extreme agony of despair, when he doubts even his own wisdom, doubts if his doubt be really doubt, he saves himself by clinging to that one certainty of which he is conscious—*his own personality*, his self-consciousness, the central point of all his concentric spheres of doubt. What Byron says in his usual bantering style, he felt in his heart of hearts—

"What a sublime discovery 'twas to make the
Universe universal egotism,
That all's ideal—*all ourselves* ! I'll stake the
World (be it what you will) that *that's* no schism."

I wished to work up to this, namely, the intense self-consciousness, egotism, subjectivity, personality,

or whatever one likes to call it, of the man. It is this, I think, together with his cynicism, that constitutes the chief characteristic of his poetry.

And, in passing, let us remark that this cynical negation that in time eliminates all recognition of feeling in others, till we are reduced to the central atom of self, is in harmony with that intellectual negation, that doubt of doubt itself, which we observed in his professed opinions. The two are in harmony—two notes, as it were, of the chord, major or minor, which constitutes a fully developed character—I say fully developed, for many characters never reach final resolution, but linger on to the end in unresolved dissonance.

Now let us turn to his poetry for a proof of what has been said. First hear what Karl Elze says of the origin of his poems: "He could only write on the spot; or at least had to receive the inspiration for his poems on the spot; he could not dispense with the direct impression made on him by means of the outward scene. Consequently (we find that) the first cantos of 'Childe Harold' originated in Belgium and Switzerland: the fourth in Italy. The 'Prisoner of Chillon' he composed at Ouchy after his return from Chillon: the 'Lament of Tasso' at Florence, after visiting Tasso's prison in Ferrara: indeed, according to Medwin, the greater part was written down in the prison itself. The 'Prophecy of Dante' was composed in Ravenna, where he daily

passed the tomb of Dante. He began 'Manfred' in Switzerland; 'Beppo,' 'The Two Foscari,' and 'Marino Faliero,' he wrote in Venice. He often declared that he could only write of what he had seen and experienced."

To Byron *self* was the only certainty and reality; and that scene alone which was clustered around that central reality was real—was capable of description. There are of course some exceptions to this, but we shall generally find that the scene described is either one that actually exists somewhere, of which the poet has himself formed the central figure, the mirror on which it is all reflected; or else, what is nearly the same thing, that the scene in which he finds himself is one described by another writer. In both cases the scene is created before hand for the poet; he merely enters it and constitutes himself the central point of coherence; he breathes, as it were, into the inanimate form the breath of life, and the whole scene is flooded with his personality, is changed from the dead material into a living thing.

In speaking of Wordsworth, I tried to show that there is a recreative as well as a creative power. With some poets the creative power bodies forth a new form. Others can only inspire the form that they find ready to hand. Byron, I think, while he is perhaps entirely incapable of the first of these acts, has to a wonderful degree the power of infusing into the surrounding scene, or the human form, not such

life as Wordsworth inspires into his recreations, but *his own personality*. The mountains, the sky, the heaving plain of ocean, storm and darkness, lightning and the crash of thunder, the re-echoing Alps, the gleaming lake, and the big rain dancing to the earth,—all these are, as it were, a part of himself, animated by his spirit, flesh of his flesh. He suffers with them—is tortured by the hum of cities and the wail of misery, and rejoices in the fierce and far delight of storm and lightning, in all its tremendous strength.

“ I live not in myself, but I become
 Portion of that around me ; and to me
 High mountains are a feeling, but the hum
 Of human cities torture : I can see
 Nothing to loathe in nature, save to be
 A link reluctant in a fleshly chain,
 Classed among creatures, when the soul can flee,
 And with the sky, the peak, the heaving plain
 Of ocean, or the stars, mingle, and not in vain.

* * * * *

Are not the mountains, waves, and skies, a part
 Of me and of my soul, as I of them ?

* * * * *

All heaven and earth are still. From the high host
 Of stars, to the lulled lake, and mountain-coast,
 All is concentrated in a life intense,
 Where not a beam, nor air, nor leaf is lost,
 But hath a part of being, and a sense
 Of that which is of all Creator and defence.

* * * * *

The sky is changed, and such a change ! O night,
 And storm and darkness, ye are wondrous strong,

Yet lovely in your strength, as is the light
 Of a dark eye in woman. Far along
 From peak to peak, the rattling crags among,
 Leaps the live thunder. Not from one lone cloud
 But every mountain now hath found a tongue,
 And Jura answers through her misty shroud
 Back to the joyous Alps, who call to her aloud.

And this is in the night. Most glorious night,
 Thou wert not sent for slumber. Let me be
 A sharer in thy fierce and far delight,
 A portion of the tempest, and of thee !
 How the lit lake shines — a phosphoric sea—
 And the big rain comes dancing to the earth !
 And now again 'tis black—and now the glee
 Of the loud hills shakes with its mountain-mirth ;
 As if they did rejoice o'er a young earthquake's birth."

It is doubtless in such scenes, when Byron indenfies himself with nature, that he is greatest. And in so far as these scenes partake of universal features, all can enter into them, and seem to be—what we often seem to ourselves in natural scenes, whether among lonely mountains, on the vast solitudes of the ocean, or in the midst of the throng and roar of crowded streets—the one central sentient point of it all.

Wordsworth's poetry makes us appropriate nature by placing things in connection with feelings common to all humanity, whereas with Byron we are obliged to follow the poet and assume his personality before we can appreciate the meaning of his descriptions. Our appreciation of such passages in Byron is increased a thousandfold if we are on the very

spot, amid the very scene. Read amid any thunder-storm the above description would be far more impressive than if we found ourselves by our fireside in a London fog, or even lying on the dry turf beneath the limes on a summer day. But go to the spot itself—Montreux, or Chillon—and experience a storm *there*; then you will learn the true meaning of these lines. Then you will hear the thunder re-echoed from Alps to Jura, and see the lit lake, like a phosphoric sea. Then, and only then, will you be a portion of that around you, and a sharer in the fierce and far delight of the earth and sky.

It is this quality—not exactly local colouring, but identity with the actual scene—that makes Byron's poems so much quoted, especially by those who have visited the places that he describes; and this probably also accounts for the value set on his poems by foreigners. This is what makes the tourist's hand-books teem with passages from his poems. Who does not visit Waterloo with the first canto of "Childe Harold" in his pocket? Who does not carry away with him a memory of Byron's lines on Clarens, and all that exquisite scenery of Lake Leman, as well as—I might almost say *instead* of—the actual scene, lovely and impressive as it is? Who that has seen Venice does not know Byron's Venice? or has not gazed with Byron, if he has gazed at all, on Dante's tomb at Ravenna, or that other tomb at Arqua? Or who has wandered through the wide grass-grown

streets of Ferrara unhaunted by the music of Byron's verse—

“ Whose symmetry was not for solitude ” ?

Can we gaze at the tombs of Angelo, Alfieri, and the “starry Galileo” in Santa Croce unmindful of the English poet? And the falls of Terni! Do we not seem to see and hear them once more as we read these magnificent lines?—

“ The roar of waters ! from the headlong height
Velino cleaves the wave-worn precipice ;
The fall of waters ! rapid as the light
The flashing mass foams shaking the abyss ;
The hell of waters ! where they howl and hiss
And boil in endless torture ; while the sweat
Of their great agony, wrung out from this
Their Phlegethon, curls round the rocks of jet
That gird the gulf around in pitiless horror set,

“ And mounts in spray the skies, and thence again
Returns in an unceasing shower, which round,
With its unemptied cloud of gentle rain,
Is an eternal April to the ground,
Making it all one emerald. How profound
The gulf ! and how the giant element
From rock to rock leaps with delirious bound,
Crushing the cliffs, which, downward worn and rent
With his fierce footsteps, yield in chasms a fearful vent ! ”

Then think of Rome, of the Campagna, Metella's tomb, of temples, baths, and halls, the Tarpeian rock, Egeria's cave, and consider how Byron's poetry carries one back to these scenes and revives their fading outlines and colours in the memory. It is hard to say how intensely it appeals to one who has visited

these spots, especially if he has wandered there *alone* as the poet wandered ; and how intensely uninteresting all this is to the majority of people who do not know the scenes. I believe that a great deal of Byron's popularity is to be traced to this local interest. To much of Byron's poetry we might almost apply his own lines—

“While stands the Coliseum—Rome shall stand :
When falls the Coliseum, Rome shall fall.”

While, and only while Italy, Switzerland, Greece, and Spain are visited by the English traveller, Byron's “Childe Harold” shall stand.

That the popularity of his poems is not to be accounted for by their poetical value is plain from the fact that many persons totally incapable of appreciating poetry, if they have visited these scenes, will quote with rapture passages that are as it were a kind of certificate to the fact that they have been abroad and have read the “Childe Harold.” One gets a little tired of the “Gladiator” and the “beautiful disdain” of the Apollo Belvedere and all the rest. But no vulgar admiration can ever lessen our enjoyment of true grandeur or beauty in either nature or art. Mr. Swinburne, however, thinks otherwise. Speaking of the grand address to the Ocean at the end of the “Childe Harold,” he says—“The loftiest passage in the ‘Childe Harold’ has been so often mouthed and mauled by vulgar admiration,

that it now can scarcely be relished. Like a royal robe worn out, or a royal wine grown sour, it seems the worse for having been so good."

In order to seize the colours and forms of each successive scene, while they were yet fresh in his memory, Byron composed his poems under local inspiration, or as soon after as he could lay pen to paper. Once, if I remember right, when Trelawny asked him to write a fifth canto of "*Childe Harold*" on the Austrian occupation of Italy, he said he could no more do it while agitated at the thoughts of the occurrence than a man could be expected to describe an earthquake while the houses were tumbling about his head. But if he could not do it in the midst of the very earthquake itself, he took the very first moment of sufficiently "tranquillized emotion" to represent his scenes in verses that themselves seem to "rejoice o'er a young earthquake's birth." To use his own simile, he was like the tiger which springs once, and no more. He would embody all his thought and passion in *one* word—and that word a quick vivid flash of lightning, "a flash, and then again 'tis black."

"Could I embody and unbosom now
That which is most within me—could I wreak
My thoughts upon expression, and thus throw
Soul, heart, mind, passions, feelings, strong or weak,—
All that I would have sought, and all I seek,
Bear, know, feel,—and yet breathe—into *one* word,
And that one word were lightning, I would speak."

The nearer we are to such a flash, the more intense it is. A small dark valley is illuminated more brightly by the bolt that falls into it than is the great expanse of the sky by the streak of lightning that just tinges the distant clouds.

What, then, is such small dark place? Where is that limited scene in which our own personality irradiates all around with the intensest glow? Doubtless it is the sphere of our personal emotions; and it is when a poet such as Byron, with his intense personality, treats of personal emotion—of love, of grief, of hate—that he touches the chords of our sympathies. This he does especially in his lyrics.

A true lyrical poem is passionate. It is this passion which makes it musical—for of all poetry lyrical poetry is, or should be, the most musical. Indeed, its passion seems to need not only the music of words, but of tones. Its very name would show this; for lyric poetry is poetry sung to the lyre. It is also necessarily *short*, like a sudden and violent storm. Its passion cannot be long sustained.

Some, indeed, suppose that all true poems should be short. The American poet Poe declares that even the great poems that we admire are merely an accumulation of small poems, not always very neatly connected. Goethe, too, warns writers against undertaking long poems. "Beware," he says, "of attempting a large work. . . . If (the poet) daily seizes the present and always treats with a freshness of

feeling what is offered to him, he always makes sure of something good." On the other hand, Keats affirms, "A long poem is the test of the Invention, which I take to be the polar star of poetry."

It is surely so. The great plans of an imaginative poet want ample space for their foundations. But with lyrical poetry, the more concentrated and the more improvised directly under the influence of the emotion it is, the better it will be. It deals with pathos, with the emotion as it actually exists; it is the realistic picture of a certain mood of passion, not the reminiscence in tranquillity of past emotion. Consequently, however true and pathetic the thing may be at a certain time and in a certain mood, its very passion makes it absurd at other times. To hear any true lyrics, especially those of Byron, sung on the public platform, or, still worse, in a private drawing-room, makes one feel this. The thing is utterly out of place amid the fine dresses and fine manners of society. It is like some poor half-nude statue standing in the drizzling dismal mists and damp rheumatic murky atmosphere of an English city, with rain-drops dribbling down its nose.

A few words must now be said about his dramas, and his dramatic powers. Shelley rightly calls these plays "undramatic dramas." As studies of character, and for ingenuity of plot, they are admirable, and were much admired by Goethe. But the one necessity, above all others, for a dramatist to possess is a power

of entering into the various characters that he brings forward, of *getting inside* them, as it were, and looking out on the world through *their* eyes, and modes of thought and feelings. And this is just the thing that Byron could not do. Under whatever mask he plays the part, he still is the one and the same ; he cannot lose his identity, and regard things with another's feelings. And so we find, as a rule, one or perhaps two similar characters are finely wrought studies of himself—but they have all the thing to themselves. The others are mere puppets ; they never have anything to say to one another when they meet ; they each go eddying about in their little circles, and never join the main stream : there is no subordination or connection. Marina, the wife of the younger Foscari (as Elze reminds us), raves and rages through the whole play with expressions of revenge and hate against the betrayer of her husband and against the Venetian authorities, surpassing even Shakespeare's Queen Margaret in her passionate anger. But nobody takes the slightest notice of her abuse. She might just as well have been quiet, or have stayed away altogether, as far as any influence is produced on the development of the plot, or the relations of the other characters.

We see this solitary character, set off by slightly sketched figures, as well as by natural scenery, in "Cain" and in the "Manfred."

Considered not as dramas but as representations

of character—intensely vivid in their personality—both of these poems are well worth study, and must excite our admiration. The “Cain” is a fierce, but somewhat futile, assault on the religious world. The poet takes for granted that the God of the Christian is a God of blood. Perhaps He is so to many well-meaning people—in theory. But in reality He is not so, and Byron’s sword passes innocuously through the phantom that he has raised. Cain’s murder is incited by the blood-stained offering of Abel, and his superstitious servility to a God who demands such sacrifice. The celestial flame descends on Abel’s altar, and a whirlwind overthrows and scatters the fruit-offering of Cain, who then exclaims—

“ I will build no more altars

Nor suffer any . . .

Abel. Cain ! what meanest thou ?

Cain. To cast down yon vile flatterer from the clouds,
The smoky harbinger of thy dull prayers—
Thine altar, with its blood of lambs and kids,
Which fed on milk, to be destroyed in blood.

Abel. Thou shalt not ! Add not impious works to impious
Words ! Let that altar stand ! ’Tis hallowed now
By the immortal pleasure of Jehovah,
In His acceptance of the victims.

Cain. *His !*

His pleasure ! What was his high pleasure in
The fumes of scorching flesh and smoking bones
To the pain of the bleating mothers, which
Still yearn for their dead offspring ? or the pangs
Of the sad ignorant victims underneath
Thy pious knife ? Give way ! This bloody record
Shall not stand in the sun to shame creation.”

In "Manfred," with its grand background of Alpine scenery, the poet brings forward the *one* character in splendid relief. The idea seems to have been suggested him by Goethe's "Faust" (for he does not seem to have read Marlowe's "Doctor Faustus"), the substance of which at least Shelley had imparted to him when they were together in Switzerland. But, as Goethe himself justly remarks, Byron has re-embodied the idea and thus produced a new creation. Although the second, and by far the more valuable, part of "Faust" was unknown to Byron (having been first published after Goethe's death in 1831), he seems to have wholly grasped the true meaning of the still undeveloped character, which in many of its traits appealed powerfully to his sympathies. But there is between the two conceptions a very radical difference. Faust no less than Manfred is (and, we may add, Goethe no less than Byron was) utterly ignorant of the only true saving power, namely a confession of human impotence and a surrender to an almighty Mercy. Both Faust and Manfred defy the fiend in their own strength—

"I stand
Upon my strength,—I do defy—deny—
Spurn back, and scorn ye!"

They both too look to the natural for succour—Faust to the natural development of æsthetic feelings which are to lift him up from sphere "to higher spheres," and Manfred to the strength of natural

passions, by the power of which he can even raise from the grave the form of his beloved Astarte, and implore her forgiveness; by which too he fights his terrible battle for self-redemption. Goethe's is the doctrine of salvation by a gradual process of refinement until man, unsatisfied with all lower gratifications, finds in *philanthropy* what he seeks, and can at length say to the fleeting moment, "Stay, thou art so fair!" There is none of that intense passion* and strength in "Faust" which Manfred displays, and with which, in spite of all that can be said, we are compelled to sympathize. While we *admire* the extraordinary picture of human nature in Goethe's poem, we are *moved* by that of Byron. Faust is a representative fellow mortal whose development we watch with interest: Manfred is, for the time, *our very self*. As in all other of Byron's poems we must assume his personality if we are to understand and feel what he says.

Manfred is tortured by the consciousness of some hideous crime, and is unable to procure self-oblivion from the spirits of nature.

No better commentary on his state could be given than what Byron has expressed in his "Childe Harold":—

"Alone—man with his God must strive,
Or it may be with demons who impair

* Faust's love for Gretchen is a mere passing sensuous attraction; and their reunion in heaven seems to me impossible to realise.

The strength of better thoughts, and seek their prey
 In melancholy bosoms, such as were
 Of moody texture from their earliest day,
 And loved to dwell in darkness and dismay,
 Deeming themselves predestined to a doom
 Which is not of the pangs that pass away,
 Making the sun like blood, the earth a tomb,
 The tomb a hell, and hell itself a murkier gloom."

This terrible battle of the conscience against the demon of a remembered crime, constitutes the grandeur of the poem. And, although such grandeur is not that of a Prometheus, unconquerably suffering for a glorious cause,—though the motive is utterly false, namely, that of a man striving with superhuman strength to *save himself*,—though we feel that one cry for mercy addressed to a Power of Love would inexpressibly surpass in sublimity this mortal defiance of Justice,—yet we cannot but feel an awe at the mighty strength displayed. It is unvanquished even in death.

"Back to thy hell!" he exclaims to the demons—those "*neri cherubini*," as Dante calls them—who would carry him off:—

"Back to thy hell !

Thou hast no power upon me—that I feel :
 Thou never shalt possess me—that I know :
 What I have done is done. I bear within
 A torture, which could nothing gain from thine :

* * * * *

I have not been thy dupe, nor am thy prey—
 But was my own destroyer, and will be
 My *own* hereafter. Back, ye baffled fiends !
 The hand of death is on me, but not yours."

Whether Byron has not only in respect to feelings but to acts drawn his own portrait in *Manfred*, and what the crime was that he, as *Manfred*, had committed, has been enough discussed by those who love to discuss such things. At the same time one cannot help, as in his other works, recognizing the presence of the poet himself. The picture that he gives of himself in the "*Childe Harold*" has many points in common with that of *Manfred* :—

"Let him speak
Who hath beheld decline upon my brow,
Or seen my mind's convulsion leave it weak ! . . .
My mind may lose its force, my blood its fire,
And my frame perish, e'en in conquering pain."

There is indeed a grandeur of restraint in this, like that which he describes in the *Laocoon*—"dignifying pain." But it is the grandeur of defiance—the defiance of one who believes in no God of Love, but a God of Blood. I cannot help thinking that we are wrong in admiring it ; that we are deceived by a sham, and that we ought to condemn and hate it no less than the sneer of the cynic. And yet we are forced to admire it, somewhat in the same way as we admire Milton's *Satan*.

Before leaving "*Manfred*" it will be well to note how lamentably Byron fails when he attempts to treat of the world of spirits. If he can paint no other human character except his own, much less can he give us a spiritual being. If we compare

the spirit scenes of "Manfred" with those in Shelley's "Prometheus," we shall, I think, recognize the vast difference between the powers of the two poets in this respect.

Of the cynicism of the "Don Juan" I have already spoken. If it is a satire, it lacks earnestness; and if it does not show in the poet a sympathy for folly and worse than folly, it at least is apt to incite the sympathies of others who have not his sense of the vanity of all things. The light vein of buffoonery is adopted from certain Italian writers—Pulci, Berni, and others, and amongst them Ariosto himself—and is often called the "Bernesque" style. It certainly suited the genius of Byron admirably, and in its way the "Don Juan" is a marvellous production. The extraordinary mastery of expression, and the still more wonderful power that Byron has of exciting our feelings—not our deeper feelings, but our superficial emotions, good and bad—with language now passionate, now pathetic, now musically sweet, now roaring like the ocean itself; now cynical and satiric, now indulging in a sudden drop from high-strung pathos to bottomless bathos, like the roll of crested waves sundered by the deep hollow trough,—all these things combine to make the poem one of the most astonishing productions of the human mind. As a specimen of the last, pathos and bathos, I will quote a passage:—

"'Tis sweet to hear the watch-dog's honest bark
Bay deep-mouthed welcome as we draw near home :

'Tis sweet to know there is an eye will mark
 Our coming, and look brighter when we come ;
 'Tis sweet to be awakened by the lark,
 Or lulled by falling waters, or the hum
 Of bees, the voice of girls, the song of birds,
 The lisp of children, and their earliest words.

* * * * *

Sweet is a legacy, and passing sweet
 The unexpected death of some old lady
 Or gentlemen of seventy years complete." . . .

I said on an earlier occasion that the value of a poem must for each of us be estimated by the effect that it produces—not by its seductive beauty, on our taste—not by its wondrous ingenuity, on our intellect—but by its adding to or strengthening our vital beliefs.

Can any of us say with candour that this cynical, humorous, pathetic poem of Byron (to place it in the best light), has had, or is likely to have, the effect of strengthening our character, of revealing to us any glimpse of that perfection on which alone our soul feeds and is strengthened? Indeed, can any of us point to many passages in any of the poems of Byron, which have done this? But I allow that he may be to others what he is not to me.

I know of no poet who can make my blood leap and tingle as he does, for instance, in his description of the storm, or of that magnificent waterfall of Terni ; nor one who as he with a few words can arouse my emotions,—as, for example, by the picture of the

Gladiator "butchered to make a Roman holiday," and swooning amidst memories of his far-distant home, of his children and their Dacian mother. I know of no poet—except perhaps Dante—whose mastery over language is so extraordinary, nor any who with such intensity of passionate energy can (to use his own words) "wreak his thoughts upon expression." But the question is not merely whether he had great poetic abilities. To this we may answer without hesitation—Yes, indescribably great. But, considering that the value of everything consists entirely in the end to which it may be put, shall we be able to assign a high value to Byron's poetry? I answer, for myself, without any hesitation—No. All these emotions are aroused in me to no purpose. No single memory of what may help me in the dark or dangerous hours of life can I trace back to Byron's poems. One bright smile of a child, one sweet face amid the crowded streets, one little flower, one solitary star—each of these has given me more than all his poems can give. And yet, before he died, he showed at least signs of a larger faith, of a renunciation of self-faith and self-redemption. Even though they may be tinged with a stain of ineradicable cynicism, his words are often expressive of a deep yearning for belief in others—for a nobler love and faith in some other than himself.

"I have not loved the world, nor the world me—
But let us part fair foes : I do believe,
Though I have found them not, that there may be

Words that are things, hopes which will not deceive,
 And virtues which are merciful, nor weave
 Snares for the failing: I would also deem
 O'er others' griefs that some sincerely grieve :
 That two, or one, are almost what they seem :
 That goodness is no name, and happiness no dream."

Whether he suffered justly or unjustly perhaps we never shall know for certain ; but that he suffered most acutely, not only in the anguish of mortified self-pride, but in the blighting (however they were blighted) of his affections, is most evident.

" Have I not—

Hear me, my mother Earth ! behold it Heaven !—

Have I not had to wrestle with my lot ?

Have I not suffered things to be forgiven ? "

But had he really felt what he said—that, although he piled on human heads the mountain of his curse, his curse should be forgiveness ; if he had really forgiven, really striven after an unselfish love, he might have learnt that true nobility and strength do not lie in defiance. His death at least was a sacrifice to the good (for such he rightly deemed it) of others, in an attempt to realize his dream that Greece might yet be free.

I am unwilling to preserve, as it were, a dissonance in the final chord ; but, in spite of all my admiration of his poetic abilities, I cannot for myself assign much true poetic value to his work ; and, as for personal character, though I fully allow that I am one of those who are *not* worthy to pass judgment on him or on

any man, yet I cannot quite agree with Mr. Swinburne, who says: "His glorious courage, his excellent contempt for things contemptible, and hatred of hateful men, are enough in themselves to embalm and endear his memory in the eyes of all who are worthy to pass judgment on him."

Goethe, perhaps, may resolve the discord for us. "Every extraordinary man," he says, "has a certain mission which he is called upon to accomplish. When he has fulfilled it, he is no longer needed upon earth in the same form, and Providence uses him for something else. . . . Mozart died in his thirty-sixth year, Raphael at the same age, Byron only a little older. But all of these had perfectly fulfilled their missions, and it was time for them to depart, that other people might have something to do."

CHAPTER X.

SHELLEY.

"I AM a lover of men, a democrat, and an atheist."

Such is the translation of a Greek verse* inscribed by Percy Bysshe Shelley in the tourist's book at Chamounix beneath certain pious reflections by a former traveller on the impossibility of atheism amid the grandeur of Alpine scenery. It was one of those defiances that Shelley was for ever hurling at the idolatry of form.

We have considered ere this the question of *form* with regard to poetic and other artistic productions, and I then shrank from more than just touching on the subject in its connection with life—with our beliefs and actions. We now find ourselves again face to face with this veiled mystery.

I think we may safely allow that form, whether in art, religion, or in anything else, is *in itself* a nonentity : that, though form is necessary as a co-efficient of

* Εἰμι φιλόανθρωπος δημοκρατικός τ' ἄθεός τε.

material existence, being, as Dante profoundly intimates, to material things what the soul is to the body, it has no existence or reality in itself; that it is as incapable of development by itself in a true living shape (I do not say as a sham and a phantom) as the plant is incapable of development from the seed without that mysterious presence which we call—even in the vegetable world—life.

When our beliefs have developed a living form, that form is true and of inestimable use to us. Indeed, we could not live in our present state without such forms. But to expect others to develop exactly the same forms, even from similar germs of belief, is as ridiculous as to expect identical growths from similar seeds in different soils and under different skies and influences. These may seem platitudes, and are allowed as theories by most of us; but when it comes to applying them in our judgments of others, we are apt to be misled by innumerable prejudices, and to draw a line beyond which our charity may not pass.

I cannot but think that we should place no limits whatever to our charity in such matters, when merely form is in question; no, not if a man should, as Shelley, utterly cast aside all form in his religious belief, and prefer to call himself an atheist, rejecting at once the popular idea and the popular name of God. In us such an act might be a fearful crime, but how can we judge of it in him? And whatever

judgment may be passed on his rejection of formal belief, it cannot be denied that at the present day many of the noblest-minded and most Christian, even I may say the most orthodox, of Englishmen have learnt to understand and appreciate the character (I do not mean merely the poetic faculties) of Shelley, and to look back with shame and indignation on the time when that howl of rabid Pharisaical bigotry poured its anathemas on the head of one who—though he erred through excess of zeal, and though his life, like David's, was not without its social crime—was in the essential of Christian spirit greatly the superior of his persecutors.

I shall first very briefly touch on the main facts of his life; then on his personal character; and then consider his poems, especially one or two of the most important.

Percy Bysshe Shelley was born on August 4, 1792, at Field Place, near Horsham, in Sussex. The family was of considerable antiquity and wealth, and the elder branch had possessed a baronetcy as far back as 1611. The younger branch received a similar honour in 1806, when Shelley's grandfather was made a baronet. In 1815 his father, Sir Timothy, inherited the title, which never descended to the son, but passed on to the grandson, the present Sir Percy Florence Shelley. Of the poet's school-days at Sion House, Brentford, we know little. From what his cousin Medwin tells

us, and from what the poet himself says in his dedication to the "Revolt of Islam," it seems that he was at that time of a delicate and sensitive character both in mind and body, shrinking alike from the rude sports and rude companionship of his schoolfellows, and even then had that intense abhorrence from anything that approached coarseness in word or deed, which formed one of the chief traits of his after character. His face was, we are told, one of "exceeding sweetness and innocence"—qualities which we can recognize in his later portrait.

From Sion House Shelley went to Eton, where his mind seems to have first assumed that defiant attitude against constituted authority which brought about all the trials of his life. But though he neglected the ordinary course of studies, and resisted what he considered the tyranny of school discipline, he was far from idle. Wild and weird romances seem at this time to have had a special attraction for him, and (not to mention such laborious works as a translation of Pliny) he wrote a novel, "Zastrozzi," which had a certain sale. This, however, was a period of receptivity rather than of originality, and we must naturally judge the man by his more mature productions. He was, to use his own words, forging the arms and armour, which as yet he could not wear or wield. Speaking of these days, he says—

“And from that hour did I with earnest thought
 Heap knowledge from forbidden mines of lore,
 Yet nothing that my tyrants knew or taught
 I cared to learn, but from that secret store
 Wrought linkèd armour for my soul, before
 It might walk forth to war among mankind.”

To chemistry especially during his earlier life he devoted much of his time. When he was at Oxford (where he took up his residence in 1810, and where he made acquaintance with his future biographer, Hogg), his mind began to turn from physical science to philosophy. All know the story of his expulsion from the university on account of a tract that he had circulated, entitled the “Necessity of Atheism.” Whether or not the authorities behaved, as some say, “brutally” on this occasion, or whether the step was not unavoidable, and whether we should lament that Shelley was thus early cast abroad on the world, branded with the stigma of disgrace, and with a heart swelling with defiance,—these are questions that I need not enter upon.

His expulsion brought on him the anger of his father, who, never partial to his son, now forbade his return to Field Place. But what seems to have grieved him more than the loss of his home, was the loss of his cousin Harriet Grove, to whom he had been engaged, and for whom he seems to have had a deep affection.

The next event that I must touch upon was

occasioned by his inborn hatred of tyranny. That Shelley ever was in love with Harriet Westbrook, it seems impossible to believe ; though I do not doubt that, had she tried to be to him what any woman, however unintellectual, may be to a man of an affectionate nature, love would have taken the place of what was mere devotion to the cause of liberty. It will be remembered how the girl, when her father wished to send her to school, wrote to Shelley, throwing herself on his protection. This was enough for the young Don Quixote. A fair lady was in distress, and her knight hastened to the rescue ; and—they were married. How the gulf between them was gradually widened by Harriet's silliness, by her indifference to her husband's interests, and to her own child Ianthe, and, more than all, by the irritating presence in their household of her sister, Eliza Westbrook, is a sad story—one that might perhaps be told of many men and women, but one that is far more sad when it relates to a man with the delicate sensitive nature that Shelley possessed, who believed in the reality of marriage only when it was a marriage of hearts and souls, not merely a formal contract.

We all, I suppose, if asked the question, would without hesitation say that the reality of marriage does consist in love. Without love a marriage is what a state government is without a national sense of morality—it is merely a form for the sake of expediency. I said, not long ago, that I thought

the mistake made by some of these poets, both in politics and private life, was the misapplication of the moral sense. It was so in their sympathies with the French Revolution. It was so in the case of Shelley. No one would deny his affirmation that true marriage should be a marriage of love; but for the sake of social expediency it is no less true that, whether the marriage be false or not, it must exist when once formed; one must accept it as a form—if for nothing else. It is perfectly impossible that this world should go on without forms. Every act we do, every object we perceive, every word we utter, and every thought we conceive, must presume the existence of material form. It is therefore our duty to choose the most reasonably useful of these forms,—not troubling ourselves overmuch about the choice, nor wasting our energies on what is of secondary importance—but choosing what seems best suited for the outward expression of our inner life, and looking upon that act of expression as the one thing of positive value in our existence. The mistake (and we must remember that it is one of the head and not of the heart) that Shelley made was to fancy that the world could go on without forms: and to his sensitive nature the imperfections of what of course are merely political and social compromises appeared monstrous and iniquitous. Marriage, considered as a legal contract, was one of these institutions which his ideal nature repelled as iniquitous, and it

appeared to him especially iniquitous when he found that he had contracted a merely legal bond for life with one whom he did not love.

“Alas, that love should be a blight and snare
To those who seek all sympathies in one !
Such once I sought in vain ; then black despair,
The shadow of a starless night, was thrown
Over the world in which I moved alone.”

This, as far as I know, is the only passage in his poems in which he refers to his first unhappy marriage. The Harriet to whom “Queen Mab” is dedicated was evidently Harriet Grove, not Harriet Westbrook. A woman whom, in a fit of chivalrous enthusiasm, he had linked to himself like (to use his own expression) “a weight of icy stone which crushed and withered his heart’s life,” was not likely to have inspired a line of such a poet as Shelley. So the almost total absence of the mention of her and of this unhappy period is little to be wondered at.

Whether they separated by mutual consent or whether Shelley left his wife suddenly, without a word, is not clear ; but at any rate they parted. Harriet does not seem to have felt the parting much, and soon consoled herself by forming other attachments. She had often before expressed a desire to commit suicide, and some years after this separation, having brought about a second domestic tragedy, she ended her life by throwing herself into the Serpentine, in November, 1816.

Before this time Shelley had fallen in love, probably for the first and last time in his life, with Mary Godwin. Both her and her father he had known for some time, and he had become an ardent disciple of the philosophy—prophetic of the rise of a new era for mankind—which was propounded in the writings of this well-meaning but mistaken philanthropist. When he was released from the ties of his first marriage Mary Godwin became his wife. Not at all unnaturally his father-in-law, Mr. Westbrooke, refused to give up to him the two children of his first marriage. The case was brought before Lord Eldon, the children were placed in the custody of a clergyman, and Shelley was obliged to pay £200 a year for their maintenance.

I state these facts without any wish to extenuate the social crimes of which Shelley was doubtless guilty. And yet let us remember that while the law must judge the act, we are very apt to accept such legal verdict as a judgment of the moral character. It is one of the most valuable truths that life has to bring us, that the *highest* good is with far more difficulty discriminated from evil than is a lower form of goodness. "Extremes meet" is a common saying, and, rightly understood, it is very true. The sublime is apt to be mistaken for the ridiculous, magnanimity for pride, spirituality for insanity, humility for weakness, true Christianity for heresy, and *vice versa*. So difficult is this distinction that perhaps one

of the truest objects of all life and education is to strengthen our power of such discrimination; and it is not to be strengthened by self-confidence and hasty verdicts, but by humility and charity. So difficult is it, that Plato affirms (and history both sacred and profane will bear him out) that the truly just man not only *may* be, but *must* be misunderstood, *must* be looked upon as unjust. If Plato can tell us this, surely we, with all our boasted enlightenment, with at least one history besides that of Socrates to prove the truth of the statement, should be careful of judging our fellow-men, even if they disregard forms which are as all-important to us as to the Pharisee were the forms of the Mosaic code.

Up to this time (1817) the only poem of any importance published by Shelley was his "Queen Mab." It is, strange as it may seem, chiefly by "Queen Mab" and by some of his short pieces, such as "The Skylark," "The Cloud," "The West Wind," and the "Sensitive Plant," that Shelley is known to the generality of readers. No wonder that, this being the case, he has not yet been assigned his proper place by public estimation. Not that the circle of his readers will ever be large: they will always be among the comparatively small number of the *συνετοί*, or initiated, as he himself called them. He himself spoke in later times of "Queen Mab" as having no literary value, and as full of crude thoughts and a rabid defiance that he had learned to

moderate. Especially was this the case as regards the attitude of his mind towards Christianity and Him whom Christians worship. As in his tract on Atheism so also in "Queen Mab" he accepted as the Christian religion the rational Christianity of the day, and there is no reason to wonder at his attack on such a religion. Later, as we find in the "Prometheus Unbound" and other of his poems, he saw the beauty of true Christianity, and accepted the gospel of Christ as the one true gospel.

I do not intend to relate the well-known story of his wanderings and residence abroad, in Switzerland, at Rome, Florence, Livorno (Leghorn), Pisa, and Spezzia; and his relationships with Byron, Leigh Hunt and others. For many reasons, and more especially to form a right estimate of his character in comparison with that of Byron, this period should be studied. It is worthy of remark how the brag and coarseness and petulance of the elder poet was subdued in the presence of that slight fair boyish form, with its large bright eyes, and earnest face. It is true that Trelawny, who gives us a very graphic and interesting picture of this period, was prejudiced perhaps unfairly against Byron, but I think the truth may be read in the works of the two poets no less than in this description of their lives.

The "last scene of all," the facts of which all probably remember, especially those who have visited the lovely bay of Spezzia, is given with minutest

details by Trelawny. Shelley had visited Leghorn, where Byron's yacht, the *Bolivar*, was at anchor, in his own, the *Don Juan*. Trelawny was at that time acting as captain of the *Bolivar*, and received Shelley. In the afternoon Shelley with his friend Williams and a boy set off on their return voyage to the bay of Spezzia, and in the midst of a sudden storm, it may be through collision with a fishing-boat, the little *Don Juan* sank, and all were drowned. The poet's body was exhumed from the sand by Trelawny, and in the presence of Byron, Leigh Hunt, and others, was burnt on the sea-shore. The ashes were taken to Rome and buried in the Protestant cemetery, near the Cestian pyramid, not far from the grave of Keats. All who know Rome remember the place, and those who have read the "Adonais" will remember the description that Shelley himself gives of it; for quoting which once more I need not offer any apology—such quotations being like gems inlaid upon the ground of common words and thoughts :—

" A slope of green access
Where, like an infant's smile, over the dead
A light of laughing flowers along the grass is spread.

" And grey walls moulder round, on which dull Time
Feeds, like slow fire upon a hoary brand,
And one keen pyramid with wedge sublime
Pavilioning the dust of him, who planned
This refuge for his memory, doth stand
Like flame transformed to marble."

Before leaving the man and turning to his poems, I shall give one or two statements made by those who knew Shelley intimately, and leave them to plead his cause.

Trelawny says (page 89), "To form a just idea of his poetry you should have witnessed his daily life The cynic Byron acknowledged him to be the best and ablest man he had ever known. The truth was that Shelley loved everything better than himself."

Mr. Hogg writes, "In no individual perhaps was the moral sense more completely developed than in Shelley; in no being was the perception of right and wrong more acute." "The purity and sanctity of his life were conspicuous." "Shelley was actually offended, and indeed more indignant than would appear to be consistent with the singular wildness of his nature, at a coarse and awkward jest;" and often "his anger was unbounded" in such cases.

Captain Medwin, speaking of Shelley's host on one occasion says, "Like all who really know Shelley, he perfectly idolized him. I have often heard him dilate on his numerous acts of benevolence, his relieving the poor, visiting them in their humble abodes, and supplying them with food, and raiment, and fuel during winter." Indeed, as Hogg says, all his friends whenever they speak of Shelley seem to fall unconsciously into the language of panegyric. No better witness could exist than Byron, the man of all others least

likely to say a good word for another, especially for one whose rivalry in the poetic world he feared. When writing to the publisher Murray, he says: "You are all mistaken about Shelley; you do not know how mild, how tolerant, how good he was." And again, in a letter to Moore: "Shelley, who is another bugbear to you and the world, is to my knowledge the least selfish, and the mildest of men—a man who has made more sacrifices of his fortune and feelings than any I have ever heard of."

At the time of his death (1822), Shelley had not completed his thirtieth year. It is vain to imagine what he might have produced had his life been spared. Enough at all events remains to place him—not as some would have him placed among the masters of musical rhythm, and mystical rhapsody—but among the great imaginative poets; for, to take one instance only, I do not know of any poet, be he Greek, Italian, German, or English, who has given us a mightier creation than that of the "Prometheus Unbound." It is true that the characters have not the defined form requisite for the drama or the epic; but if there was any truth in what was said with regard to the difference between ancient and modern art (when I expressly chose this very "Prometheus Unbound" as a contrast to the "Prometheus Bound" of Æschylus), it follows that the comparative indistinctness of representation is essential in such poetic creation—which is produced not by perfection of the

finite but by revelations of the infinite. The poem is intensely *lyrical* throughout—reminding one of some grand symphony far more than of a statue.

But before considering the "Prometheus" I must at least mention some of the other poems.

Shelley's first really great poem was the "Alastor." Of it Mr. Symonds justly says, "Rarely has blank verse been written with more majesty and music: and while the influence of Milton and Wordsworth may be traced in certain passages, the versification, tremulous with lyrical vibrations, is such as only Shelley could have produced."

Alastor is a Greek word, meaning a spirit of revenge that drives its victim to wander among solitary places. The Alastor in this case was an unsatisfied longing for ideal loveliness and perfection; and the poet wanders over the face of the earth, to "Athens and Tyre, and Balbec, and the waste of Babylon, the eternal pyramids, Memphis and Thebes," and through Arabia and Persia, till in a vale of Cachmire he has in a dream a vision of one whose "voice was like the voice of his own soul." But his dream vanishes, and after further wanderings he finds a green nook on the verge of precipitous rocks; and there, while the "dim and horned moon hung low," he "upon an ivied stone reclined his languid head," and his spirit passed away.

The poem is full of wonderful beauties—with sudden lights as it were flashing across the strange

scenery. The description of and the address to the swan are inexpressibly beautiful.

The "Revolt of Islam" stands next. It was published first under the name of "Laon and Cythna," the two chief characters in the piece; but re-issued under its present name in 1818, shortly before Shelley left England. Laon is evidently (as is Lionel in "Rosalind and Helen," and the poet in "Alastor") an idealized portrait of the poet himself—a being expressing his aspirations and passions. Cythna is his ideal of woman's love, which the wandering poet in "Alastor" seeks, and which, for a time at least, Shelley himself found in Mary Godwin. For a time, I say, for the "Epipsychidion," addressed to an Italian lady, Emilia Viviani, shows us clearly how after all he discovered that (to use his own words), "the error consists in seeking in a mortal image the likeness of what is perhaps eternal." The story of the "Revolt" is that of a young poet-prophet who arouses a nation to overthrow the tyranny of despotism, the temporary triumph of the cause of liberty, the final defeat of the revolt and the martyrdom of Laon, with whom Cythna also perishes, a willing sacrifice.

The descriptions of a fairyland scenery amid which the two travel—especially of the river down which they float in their boat with its prow of "moon-stone;" the horrible scenes of massacre, and of the ghastly pestilence; the tender scenes of love;

the description of the fight between the eagle and the snake ; and, last though not least, the beautiful dedication to his wife,—all these might surely convince any one that Shelley's powers were not merely those of "musical rhythm." That a poet who could write the "Cloud," with its ethereal music—

"Sweet as a singing rain of silver dew,"

could also draw the scenes that Shelley has drawn in his "Revolt of Islam" and his "Prometheus" shows no ordinary versatility.

The "Cenci" is another of Shelley's great works. Many know the story of Beatrice Cenci, and have gazed at Guido Reni's picture, wondering if that sad innocent face could dare such a crime—if a crime it was. That the play of the "Cenci" is powerfully conceived, and that it is far superior as a dramatic piece to any, for instance, that Byron produced, is now, I fancy, universally admitted. Indeed Mr. Symonds calls it the greatest tragedy composed in England since the time of Shakespeare. It is a splendid instance of objective work which confronts those who would despise Shelley's poetry as too subjective, and who, as Carlyle, talk about Shelley as one who merely filled the earth with an inarticulate wailing. It shows his power in a form that (as he himself says) the multitude can recognize.

The "Prometheus" was looked upon by the poet himself, and is looked upon by many of his readers,

as the grandest of all his works. I have already spoken of it as the most magnificent mystical drama that has ever been written. I am, I confess, awestruck at the sublime conceptions of Æschylus, I am filled with love and admiration for the ideals of Sophocles, and am refreshed and invigorated by the incomparable pictures of human character painted by Shakespeare, and do not know whether more to love the beauty of "Paradise," or to be terrified at the horrors of the "Inferno;" but I know of no poet who by the combination of grand imaginative sublimity and passionate *lyric* feeling, treating of questions far more vitally interesting (at least to our modern minds) and infinitely more sublime in their essence than those of most other poets, has embodied such thoughts and feelings in such a wondrous poetic creation. The play of "Prometheus Unbound" must be read attentively to be understood and appreciated—read more than once, even by those who grasp the general idea at once. Merely to give an idea of its action, I will run through it and quote a few passages.

The opening scene discovers Prometheus still bound on an icy rock, near a ravine in the Indian Caucasus, much as we left him in Æschylus' drama. Two attendant spirits, daughters of Ocean, Panthea and Ione, are by his side. The monologue of the Titan, with which the poem opens, is of superb grandeur. It is in form very Greek, and rivals in stately rhythm and power the verses of Æschylus himself,

from whom indeed some lines are almost literally translated.

Voices of nature are now heard describing the desolation wrought on the earth by the tyranny of Jupiter. Earth herself approaches and adds her voice :—

“ The tongueless caverns of the craggy hills
Cried, ‘ Misery ! ’ then ; the hollow heaven replied
‘ Misery ! ’ And the ocean’s purple waves
Climbing the land howled to the lashing winds,
And the pale nations heard it, ‘ Misery ! ’ ”

Prometheus has uttered a prophetic curse against the tyrant. He demands its re-echo from nature, but Earth dares not utter it. It may only be uttered in the language of the dead, that mute voice which the phantoms in the world below can use—the world in which there are shadows or phantoms of everything. The phantom of Jupiter is called up to repeat the curse uttered against his supernal self, of which this phantom is the shadow. The curse is uttered, and Prometheus, with a grand forgiveness says—

“ It doth repent me : words are quick and vain :
Grief for awhile is blind, and so was mine :
I wish no living thing to suffer pain.”

Earth, who typifies earthly feeling and sympathy, is incapable of understanding the lofty motive of such forgiveness, and thinks Prometheus is vanquished. But amidst her wails approaches Mercury, messenger of Jove :—

But see, where through the azure chasm
Of yon forked and snowy hill,
Trampling the slant winds on high
With golden-sandalled feet, that glow
Under plumes of purple dye,
Like rose-ensanguined ivory,
A shape comes now,
Stretching on high from his right hand
A serpent-cinctured wand."

Mercury is attended by the Furies—the hell-hounds of Jove. After endeavouring in vain to make Prometheus divulge his secret, and to submit to the tyrant's power, Mercury departs and the Furies attempt to torture him—*not* by physical torture, "rending him bone from bone"—but by calling up visions of those who have battled and suffered for mankind. Among these visions is a terrible picture of the Crucifixion. But Prometheus is unbent. The sights with which he is tortured merely serve to "gird his soul with new endurance;" and after the Furies have left him spirits of the "dim caves of human thought" come, at Earth's bidding, to minister to him and refresh him,—the spirits, apparently, of liberty, forgiveness, philosophy, poetry, and others. "How fair these air-born shapes!" exclaims Prometheus, "and yet I feel most vain all hope but *love*." No solace that the intellect or imagination can give is enough—love only is enough.

Asia, daughter of Ocean, is beloved by Prometheus. She is evidently the personification of ideal

beauty. Asia and Panthea (to omit several scenes) visit the cave of Demogorgon, that "tremendous gloom," described in lines that I have already quoted, who is destined to overthrow Jupiter. He dare not utter the name of the Supreme God of living things, the "prince of the world," but foretells his ruin. Then come the procession of the Hours. The car of the fated hour arrives, and Demogorgon floats up from his throne like a terrific shadow and mounts the car, while another, an "ivory shell inlaid with crimson fire," carries off Asia and Panthea.

Demogorgon appears before the congregated gods in heaven, descends from the car, and moves towards the throne of Jupiter, who, appalled, cries out, "Awful shape ; what art thou ? Speak !"

"Eternity !" answers Demogorgon. "Demand no direr name. Descend, and follow me down the abyss." Jupiter sinks, overwhelmed by the fearful shape of darkness, in vain striving to wield his thunderbolts.

"The elements obey me not. I sink
Dizzily down, ever, for ever, down !
And like a cloud mine enemy above
Darkens my fall with victory."

The rest of the play, after the release of Prometheus and his union with Asia, is a magnificent hallelujah chorus—the spirits of Nature, Earth, Ocean, the Moon, with Panthea and Ione, harping celestial harmonies of joy at the dawn of the new era of Love.

In fine contrast to this is the funeral dirge, chanted by the Hours over their king ; for Time is dead, and death swallowed up in victory :—

“ Strew, oh strew,
Hair, not yew,
Wet the dusty pall with tears, not dew !
Be the faded flowers
Of Death's bare bowers
Spread on the corpse of the King of Hours.”

Two visions follow, representing, I suppose, the new-born heaven and earth ; the one an infant, clothed in resplendent light, sitting in a chariot like the moon—that “ thinnest boat in which the mother of the months is borne ;” the other a transparent orb in the midst of which, “ pillowed upon its alabaster arms,” the “ spirit of the earth is laid asleep.”

After another outburst of joy from the earth and the moon, who exult in the new power of love, Demogorgon, or Eternity, approaches and ends the poem with these words :—

“ . . . Conquest is dragged captive through the deep :
Love from its awful throne of patient power
In the wise heart, from the last giddy hour
Of dead endurance, from the slippery steep
And narrow verge of craglike agony, springs
And folds over the world its healing wings.
Gentleness, virtue, wisdom, and endurance,
These are the seals of that most firm assurance
Which bars the pit over Destruction's strength.

* * * * *

To defy Power which seems omnipotent—

To love and bear—to hope till hope creates
 From its own wreck the thing it contemplates—
 Neither to change, nor flatter, nor repent,—
 This, like thy glory, Titan, is to be
 Good, great, and joyous, beautiful and free,
 This is alone Life, Joy, Empire, and Victory.”

To some minds, and I believe to not a few minds, Shelley's poetry, especially when he soars highest, is and ever must remain unintelligible and useless. It appears like the ravings of delirium, in the same way as the inspired eloquence of the apostles was attributed to drunkenness. It is the fate of all that is true and living to be dogged by its phantom—such a false “double” as Shelley describes in his “Prometheus.” The sham, the phantom of such poetry as Shelley's—false spirituality with its raving nonsense, turbid foamy splutterings and magniloquent verbiage, and, far worse, with its sensual teaching—may be found in some of our present poetry: and it is but natural that those who do not understand Shelley should confound the true with its sham. The two have a certain resemblance in outward form, but the one, founded on true principles is supremely great and true, the other supremely false and vain.

I spoke of the “Prometheus Unbound” as a wondrous poetic creation, and such I hold it to be in the highest sense.

It is quite true that art requires form for its creations. But we have seen that it does not follow that form in poetry need be of a sculptresque definite

character. Even in Milton we saw that the modern spirit produced an indefiniteness—as in Satan's helm plumed with terror, and in the description of that phantom of Death—which, while it added a mysterious grandeur, did not in the least injure the poetic reality of the creation.

In Shelley there is a grandeur and an ethereal loveliness connected with this same indefiniteness of outline, such as I do not know of in any other poet. Let me give examples; first of grandeur, the description of Demogorgon, the "tremendous gloom."

"I see a mighty darkness
Filling the seat of power, and rays of gloom
Dart round, as light from the meridian sun,
Ungazed upon and shapeless; neither limb
Nor form, nor outline; yet we feel it is
A living spirit."

Then for a vision of unearthly beauty, let us take the description of the hours passing in rapid flight; some looking fearfully back as if pursued, others leaning forwards and urging on their rainbow-winged steeds, eager for the future,—types of hope and remorse:—

"The rocks are cloven, and through the purple night
I see cars drawn by rainbow winged steeds
Which trample the dim winds: in each there stands
A wild-eyed charioteer, urging their flight.
Some look behind, as fiends pursued them there,
(And yet I see no shapes but the keen stars);
Others with burning eyes lean forth and drink

With eager lips the wind of their own speed,
 As if the thing they loved fled on before,
 And now, even now, they clasped it : their bright locks
 Stream like a comet's flashing hair ; they all
 Sweep onward."

After these approaches the car of the hour destined
 to bear Demogorgon to victory.

"See near the verge another chariot stays—
 An ivory shell inlaid with crimson fire,
 Which comes and goes within its sculptured rim
 Of delicate strange tracery : the young spirit
 That guides it has the dovelike eyes of hope.
 How its soft smile attracts the soul ! as light
 Lures winged insects through the lampless air."

What an ethereal creation, too, is the "Skylark,"
 floating in the golden lightning of the sunken sun,
 fading away into the pale purple evening, soaring and
 singing as it soars ! The *bird* is lost ; its voice alone
 is heard ; it is a "presence to be felt"—"we hardly
 see, we feel that it is here."

Open the page almost where we will in Shelley's
 poems, and we find the same spiritual element.

Instead of presenting us with rich natural scenery
 and sensuous loveliness, as Keats, and instead of
 recreating common things for us, as Wordsworth has
 done, Shelley treats directly of the spiritual truths
 which underlie all existence.

These truths are treated also directly by the
 philosopher. He speaks of them in the abstract.
 He defines, and classifies them, and deduces his

theories of ethics from the relations that they hold to the human mind. The religious teacher will endeavour to strengthen our belief in such truths by argument and persuasion. The good man will embody his beliefs in his thoughts and acts. And the poet will body forth his vision in poetic creations.

Now the question is not how Shelley has treated of these spiritual truths as a philosopher, or as a moralist, nor whether his actual life seems to us to prove a belief in such truths; but whether he has given us true poetic embodiments of the celestial vision. Do these creations of his represent for us eternal verities? And if they, as no other poet's creations, do so, then he is at all events the greatest poet who has treated such a subject; and inasmuch as the subject is the loftiest, the most celestial of all subjects, we must allow that he is the greatest poet of the highest class of poets.

To me at least Shelley's creations seem to be the most *direct* of all poetic revelations of eternal truth and loveliness. His vision seems to me to have been the divinest, and his love the most passionate for the glory that he has seen. He has as a poet a message for us that we might gladly listen to from one who had even the smallest faculty of communicating it. The feeblest glimmerings of such a celestial vision reflected in a poet's creations would be of more intrinsic value than the most splendid reproduction of sensuous beauty. But when in Shelley I find not

only the vision but a faculty of bodying forth shapes that, by their unearthly and ethereal loveliness and grandeur, reveal to me that vision more than any merely earthly shapes, whether natural or imagined, have ever done, I cannot but look upon him as the most spiritual, and, in this sense at least, the greatest of poets.

The Greeks recognized the great agencies of nature, and the workings of what seemed to them a capricious but an inexorable fate. These powers they incorporated in their mythology, in their Supernal and Infernal Gods, in their Ate and Nemesis, in their Naiads and Dryads and Fauns.

Shelley too saw great powers behind the veil of the material world. But instead of an unintelligible Fate and the tyranny of a Zeus, he saw the true vision of Love "on its awful throne of patient power:" he saw supreme justice, and truth, and loveliness; and for this new vision he is the one poet who has given us a new mythology. That the forms in this new-created world are not solid material shapes with distinct outlines is but to be expected. They are the very reverse of what the Greek artist gives us; namely, a material shape wrought up to exquisite perfection. They are spiritual beings radiant with a celestial light, or looming with unearthly grandeur. In such a poet moreover we cannot expect ordinary pathos, and many might miss the display of common human feelings. His passion is too ideal. I would

not allege this as a fault ; but one fault I do find, viz. that he is destructive and defiant, and in so far as he is so he is perhaps valueless. But, as I said when speaking of him in contrast with Byron, he is something besides a destructive genius, and his whole worth consists in this something more. What he did not attain to in his philosophy, or at all events in his life (which was one continuous defiance of old forms), he has attained in his poems—namely, the creation of new forms in which to represent the new vision.

In conclusion, I shall speak of one more poem—the “Adonais,” an elegy on the death of John Keats.

In this poem the thoughts are of the loftiest, most spiritual nature, but they are cast into a form as exquisitely proportioned and defined as that of a Greek work of art. Shelley himself says of it, “It is a highly wrought piece of art, and perhaps better, in point of composition, than anything I have written.”

The general outline is adopted from the lament of the Greek poet Bion for Adonis, and from that of Moschus for Bion.

Instead of the goddess Aphrodite Shelley appeals to the celestial muse, Urania. Instead of the cupids that assemble as mourners in the Greek poems, he summons dreams, thoughts, splendours, and phantasies—all the lovely creations of the dead poet, over whom, their beloved master, they weep. And

instead of the shepherds who come to mourn over Bion, we have the poets Byron, Moore, and Shelley himself.

After a fierce outburst of denunciation against the murderer of Keats—for such he believed the critic of the “*Endymion*” to be—a denunciation which in its terrible earnestness may be well contrasted with Byron’s flippant lines on the same subject,—he soars from all earthly passion, and speaks of eternity and immortality in words which, not only for the unsurpassed melody of their majestic music, but for the loftiness of their meaning, entitle Shelley to a place at least beside the greatest poets.

“Peace, peace, he is not dead, he doth not sleep :
He hath awakened from this dream of life—

* * * * *

He has outsoared the shadow of our night :
Envy and calumny and hate and pain,
And that unrest which men miscall delight
Can touch him not and torture not again :

●

He lives, he wakes—’tis Death is dead, not he.”

Is not this the triumph song of spirit victorious over mortality? Life is but the shadow of the true—our “birth” (to use Wordsworth’s exquisite words) “is but a sleep and a forgetting.” Death is but, as Shelley himself says in the “*Prometheus*,” “the veil which they who live call life: they sleep and it is lifted,”—or, to use the magnificent metaphor that occurs a little later in this “*Adonais*”:

"Life, like a dome of many-coloured glass,
 Stains the white radiance of eternity,
 Until Death tramples it to fragments."

And so Adonais has awakened into the true life, the true spiritual world. He is "gathered to the kings of thought;" he is welcomed by those "inheritors of unfulfilled renown," amid whom he too is star-enthroned. He is "made one with nature," a part of that spiritual existence which (to use once more Wordsworth's expression) "rolls through all things," that creative power of beauty which moulds the dull material world into living forms of loveliness—

"He is a portion of the loveliness
 Which once he more lovely : he doth bear
 His part, while the one Spirit's plastic stress
 Sweeps through the dull dense world, compelling there
 All new successions to the forms they wear ;
 Torturing the unwilling dross that checks its flight
 To its own likeness, as each mass they bear,
 And bursting in its beauty and its might
 From trees and beasts and men into the heaven's light."

After that lovely description of the Roman cemetery in which Keats is buried, a portion of which I have already given, he speaks of himself, in words which would seem almost prophetic of his own death.

The spirit of Adonais calls him, and beacons him over the ocean like a star, onwards to eternity.

"'Tis Adonais calls—O, hasten thither !
 No more let Life divide what Death can join together.

* * * * *

The breath whose might I have invoked in song
Descends on me : my spirit's bark is driven
Far from the shore, far from the trembling throng
Whose sails were never to the tempest given :
I am borne darkly, fearfully, afar :
Whilst burning through the inmost veil of Heaven
The soul of Adonais, like a star,
Beacons from the abode where the Eternal are."

THE END.



